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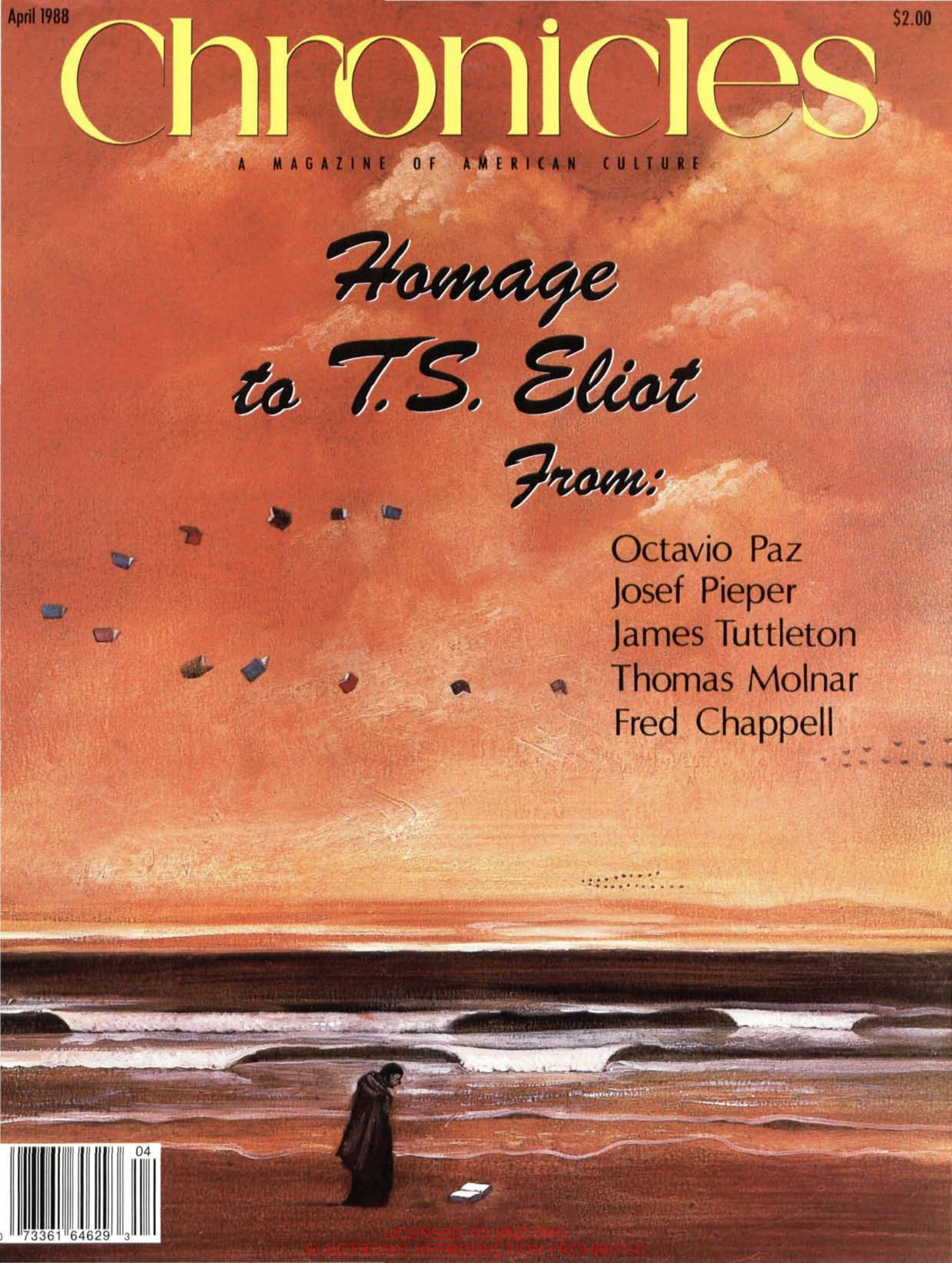
Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Homage to T.S. Eliot

From:

Octavio Paz
Josef Pieper
James Tuttleton
Thomas Molnar
Fred Chappell



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Chronicles
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Cui bono? That is the question to ask now that the fur and feathers have settled from the celebrated January match between gamecock Vice President Bush and wildcat Dan Rather. Clearly the answer is George Bush. Before the encounter Bush had two serious liabilities: a general impression of wimpishness and a lingering taint (at least among grass roots conservatives) of Liberal Republicanism.

All that, it would appear, was turned completely around in less than 10 minutes. The Vice President is now the hero of 10,000 American barrooms, where people are slapping each other on the back and saying: "How about ole Bush? The first guy to tell off Rather since George Wallace!" And the conservatives, always ready to grasp at a straw, are telling themselves that if CBS wanted to get the Vice President that bad, he must be better than they feared.

Paranoids on the old right suspect that the whole thing was an orchestrated affair. Imagine what's going on in the minds of the CBS brass: The American rubes are no longer buying the Democrats. Since even a replay of Watergate didn't work, the next President will be a Republican. Which one of those guys can we live with? Obviously Bush. If we put Rather on his tail, we can kill two birds with one stone: wipe out the wimp image and get rid of Rather, whose behavior is increasingly bizarre.

Stranger things have happened. The TV bosses have always, in fact, tried to orchestrate the Republican Party. In 1964, during their stop-Goldwater phase, they promoted the ineffably forgettable Governor Scranton into a national folk hero in a matter of a few days. They kept alive the hopeless presidential candidacy of the late Governor Rockefeller for 20 years. (If I recall rightly, some of them were still touting his inevitable victory right down to the second day of the Republican National Convention in 1968.)

With Bush, they have something to work with. It has always, actually, been unkind and unfair to consider the Vice President a wimp. He has more courage and integrity than most politicians. His real weakness is not in his character, it is in his intellect. George Bush has never had an *idea* that was a genuine solid conviction learned in the school of real life. That is, he has never taken a public stand that had behind it anything more than pleasant plausibility and vague good intentions. Duking it out with Dan Rather over whether or not he was asleep at what meeting does not change this a bit.

In this, he is simply nothing more and nothing less than the legatee of Liberal Republicanism. Viewed over the long haul of its history, the Republican Party (like the Democratic) is a strange, strange entity. Now, nearing the end of the Reagan revolution, the Republican Party finds itself with no capacity to move constructively into the future, or to do anything but fade reflexively back into its past. Its leading candidate is a throwback to Rockefeller and Scranton, and its second chance, Senator Dole, is a throwback to Nixon and Ford. Some revolution. (Of course, I am forgetting Representative Kemp, who is a throwback to Horace Greeley. The most positive force in the party, Mr. Robertson, brings back happy memories of William Jennings Bryan, who was, alas, a Democrat.)

If Bush could somehow dedicate himself to continuing the Reagan program, there might be some hope. We knew, in 1980, or thought we knew, what the Reagan program was. The trouble is, now, nobody has the slightest idea what the "Reagan program" means. There are many, many reasons why this is so, but one of them is that what Mr. Reagan stood for has been hopelessly blurred and diffused by the former Bush supporters with whom the President has stocked his administration.

Reaganism is over, whoever is nominated. I am betting that within hours after President and Mrs. Reagan take off for the ranch next January, no one will even remember it, not even professional Republicans and commentators with a slow news day.

—*Clyde Wilson*

American professors of literature (or a large number of them) have been in thrall for some time to a body of "literary theory" exported from Europe in the late 60's. The basic masters are Marx and Freud, followed by de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, and the developers of this property now most in vogue seem to be the philosopher Derrida and the psychoanalyst Lacan; but as time passes it appears that the abiding fascination for the Americans is with Freud and Marx themselves. By now the federated squadrons of Marxists, neo-Freudians, deconstructionists, and Lacanians, with their close allies the feminists and the "new historicists" are largely in control of the academic centers of cultural tradition in this country, and their professed aim is to dismantle the institutions.

Nonacademic Americans can have no conception of the scale of this invasion, but a pair of university press catalogs that dropped into the mail the other day will give a hint. Between them, Johns Hopkins and Cornell University presses are currently listing some 120 books on "literary theory," an outlay to the library that buys all of them for about $2,500 at discounted prices. Obviously, no individual academic can either afford them or, in any real sense of the word, read them. This is not just a question of the time involved. Most of them are written in a turgid, hermetic style that is intentionally unreadable.

It is hard to see how a librarian will make a decision. The catalogs give little help, for according to quotations from professorial readers these books individually and as a set are exemplary, bold, brilliant, important, surefooted, lucid, cogent, ground-breaking, thought-provoking, sustained, landmarking, exhilarating, deeply concerned and/or committed, richly suggestive, challenging, sublime, and

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breathtaking. There is even a surprising, perhaps significant element of military metaphor: combative, powerful, forceful, penetrating, attacking on every front. One book, all by itself, is full, rigorous, perceptive, subtle, faithful, educational, path-breaking, and original—all in three sentences. This, though, is a book about Derrida, and the reader is Derrida, so we should probably make some allowances for uncritical enthusiasm, even for egotism and coxcombry.

In fact we should probably allow for uncritical enthusiasm and a measure of egotism and coxcombry all round. Even so, making every allowance, and wondering in the process what has happened to criticism, the thought is bound to occur that something is going on here. These lists are the merest whisker, scale, or claw of a monster that is thriving in the protected environment of the universities, themselves a leviathan that swallowed up long ago the Jonah of real scholarship and teaching. Universities, operating as interlocking cartels untouched by reality in the form of either market competition or informed public regulation, spend huge sums—more, probably, than the GNP of several small nations—to patronize this writing. Nor is it just the expense of publishing the stuff and buying the results, not even the leaves, grants, fellowships, reduced teaching loads, and conference expenses that make up the real cost. Rather it is in the support of a whole system of language and literature teaching that is supposed to be doing one thing and is doing another.

Doing it very successfully, too. These books and the teachings that go with them are not a by-product of the system. They are the product. Unlike earlier kinds of criticism, which in general encouraged the reading of literature, these books dispose of literature in favor of politics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. One result is that the more literature (in name at least) is taught, the less people read it. No one can blame the student who, after encountering this kind of approach in an English class, decides never to open a work of imaginative literature again. Another result, apparent to teachers who still want to teach literature, is that the works themselves, especially the older ones, drop out of print for students. As a form of censorship, this is more effective in the long run than more vociferous kinds that get into the newspapers. Johns Hopkins and Cornell are touting a hundred highly subsidized books for academics, most of them unreadable and surely not-much-to-be-read, but the *Anatomy of Melancholy* is now out of print for general readers and students, probably for the first time since it was written. The immense amount of "scholarly activity" going on in fields like Renaissance studies gives a false impression. Whatever these people are doing, they are not teaching much literature to undergraduates. They are "emptying out," to use a term in vogue with "new historicists," the undergraduates' inheritance.

—*Frank W. Brownlow*

Yale Scholar's articles found in Nazi paper, read the headline in the *New York Times* for December 1, 1987. Paul de Man was a prolific member of the Yale Hermeneutical Mafia, which made the term "deconstructionism" an academic byword. By the time he passed away in December 1984, he was Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale. Now a young Belgian scholar, Ortwin de Graef has unearthed hundreds of articles de Man contributed during World War II to the Nazi paper *Le Soir*, including a piece in a special edition of *Le Soir* devoted to the Jewish Question. De Man's uncle had been a minister in the Nazi puppet government of Belgium during the period he had been writing these pieces, 1941-42. They are slated to be published in the *Oxford Literary Review* next year with comments from some 50 writers.

"The articles appear to go to the heart of the ethical debate still raging over Dr. de Man's work at Yale," pontificated the *Times*. R.W.B. Lewis of Yale thought deconstructionism removed the ethical aspect from literature.

The *Times* tried and failed to give a one-sentence definition of deconstructionism, and we shall not attempt one here. Its quarrel with traditional literary interpretation goes back many centuries, to the disagreements of Plato and Isocrates in the fourth century, B.C., as the master Jacques Derrida knew. Traditional literary studies are logocentric. In them the word, especially as found in great masterpieces, reveals an author, a subject, and a vision of reality. So we read to meet Thucydides, Pericles, and a vision of war or St. John, Jesus, and a beatific vision or Camus, Meursault, and Existentialism. For the deconstructionist, what matters in literature is the interaction and interrelationship of the words on the page. There are no "Great Books" and the idea of an author and his intention, of an objective metaphysical system. That words can reveal another person or reality is part of the Platonic and Christian conspiracy, a nightmare from which we are beginning to awaken. The author is not a creative hero, the interpreter is not a brilliant discoverer. As Denis Donogue phrased it, "the enemy is the bourgeois state . . . its language is a program for making unofficial language impossible."

The issue is not the abolition of the ethical from literature, as the *New York Times* and Professor Lewis pretend. It is the relation of current literary currents to the Nazi Big Lie. For the advocates of the Big Lie in politics and literature do not favor the false *per se*. They do insist that the person with the proper theory is preferable, more sophisticated than a simpleminded 19th-century obsession with facts. "Alles Faktisches ist nur Theorie," Goethe once observed. Some of us think that fact and theory live in a mutual relationship of control and discovery. Theory opens up new areas to interest and investigation, but facts check, modify, and perhaps even refute theory.

The theoreticians of literature and politics, Nazis and Marxists, feminists and deconstructionists have learned that we are all limited by biases and presuppositions. They therefore conclude that there are no objective checks or controls on the play of the imagination. I do not exaggerate. I attended a day-long conference on Derek Freeman's discussion of the inadequacies of Margaret Mead's dissertation. It was considered sufficient refutation that he was a man and an Australian attacking an American woman. Evidence of disastrous ignorance of Greek in feminist scholarship in classics is met with the reply that the work is theory and the reviewer a man

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and a conservative. When the new editor of the *American Journal of Philology*, a European with many commentaries and critical editions to his credit, opined that it was still interesting to discover what a word meant in a specific context, there was a special open session held at the annual professional meetings where some 50 people mocked the idea that "in 1987 anyone could still believe that a word has a particular meaning in a specific context."

It is wrong to deny that these people are taking the ethical element out of literature. They are out to overthrow false authority and liberate the reader from submission to dubious claims to reverence and respect. For them there is only an ethical aspect. All objective evidence that could refute their claims are denied *ex hypothesi*. Mead's dissertation must be adequate because she became a role model for feminists, just as the Communists must have burned down the Reichstag. Our theory is the final adjudicator of truth and so-called objective evidence, even historical documentation or the rules of Greek grammar are rejected *a priori*.

Here there is complete agreement among liberals, Marxists, and Nazis. The enemy is the traditional view that there is a reality, open to investigation, outside of ideology. Even among "conservatives" there are ideologues who share the theorist view.

There are practical consequences. Why does the American Civil Liberties Union oppose local communities setting up Christmas crèches but support the right of Nazis to stage provocative marches in Skokie, Illinois? In my opinion, for the same reason that Yale president Bartlett Giammati wrote letters to freshmen warning them against Jerry Falwell, while granting the highest academic honors to a Nazi. It is the reason, by the way, that tenure in the humanities is usually awarded without any substantial, refereed publications and that some humanities scholars of international reputation never hold a tenure track position. These, of course, are facts. If they do not fit with our theories, we are free to ignore them.

The de Man affair deserves more discussion than it will receive. The significant issue in education today is whether high school principals should have the power to censure their students' newspaper, not whether our academic intellectual life is permeated by the Nazi Big Lie. At least, that is the theory.

—*E. Christian Kopff*

Vladimir Lakshin, a literary critic and an erstwhile member of the editorial board of the literary magazine *Novy Mir* during Alexander Tvardovsky's tenure as editor in chief, gleefully reports "an unprecedented development" in the 1988 subscriptions to that magazine. In his article "To Row Higher," which appeared in the December 20 issue of the weekly *Moscow News*, Lakshin writes: "For the first time ever, *Novy Mir* has passed the million-subscriber mark! Surely, this must be an absolute all-time record for 'thick' literary magazines anywhere; an accomplishment deserving of an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records."

He also reports that the magazine *Druzhba Narodov*, which published Anatoly Rybakov's hit novel *Children of the Arbat*, has collected 770,000 subscriptions, while the magazine *Znamya* will have to double its circulation to cope with the crush of 550,000 subscribers.

It goes without saying that there is nothing mysterious in that "unprecedented record," and Lakshin himself undoubtedly is well aware of it. Last year, *Novy Mir* published a host of superb, hitherto banned authors and books. For the first time in the history of the Soviet Union, the magazine printed Platonov's *The Pit*, Nabokov's essays, Joseph Brodsky's poetry. This year, *Novy Mir*'s editorial board plans to print, along with Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, Yuri Dombrovsky's "The Unneeded Things Department," some pieces by the late Varlaam Shalamov, and many other works. All of them have been freely available in the democratic world for decades. Of course, during 1987, previously banned Soviet or émigré authors were not the sole attraction. *Novy Mir* also came out with Chingiz Aitmatov's *The Chopping Block*, a bold book as boldness goes in the Soviet Union, and Nikolai Shmelev's riveting article "Advance Payments and Debts," as thrilling as any work of fiction. *Znamya* likewise printed several extraordinary works of fiction and journalism, hitherto unimaginable in the pages of a Soviet periodical, such as Anna Akhmatova's "Requiem" or Tvardovsky's poem "By Right of Memory" or Mikhail Koryakov's articles.

Hence the exultation of Vladimir Lakshin, who skillfully and courageously defended Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* against neo-Stalinist attacks after *Novy Mir* printed it and who had to leave the magazine following Tvardovsky's downfall. As far back as 1964, while Khrushchev was still in power, I met Lakshin in *Novy Mir*'s offices, and he told me that Solzhenitsyn's book had split the Soviet Union right down the middle: "Tell me your attitude to Ivan Denisovich, and I'll tell you who you really are!" insisted the critic. Apparently, the same is true for the "thick" magazines mentioned by Lakshin. Hard-liners and "goodthinkers," to use George Orwell's term, can hardly be expected to derive much pleasure from seeing the names of Nabokov, Brodsky, Platonov, Dombrovsky, and Pasternak's novel appearing in the Soviet press. It is highly doubtful that party "goodthinkers" swell the ranks of subscribers. One has to think they are doing exactly the opposite: trying mighty hard to put the brakes on *glasnost*.

But this freedom of subscription to literary magazines is a prototype of free elections. It would be interesting to find out—unfortunately, Lakshin avoids the subject—the 1988 subscription figures for, say, *Kommunist*, *Partiinoye stroitel'stvo*, or other ideologically "correct" periodicals. Through a free expression of their will—subscription—the Soviet readers have voted for free literature and freethinking; Lakshin was right to subtitle his article "What the Readers Are Voting For." This begs an interesting question: Who and what would the Soviet voter vote for in the event of genuinely free elections not just in the matter of subscriptions but in all areas of social and spiritual life?

—*Mihajlo Mihajlov*

Several incorrect line divisions appeared within February's poem, "Autumn Day." See page 16 in this issue for the amended version.

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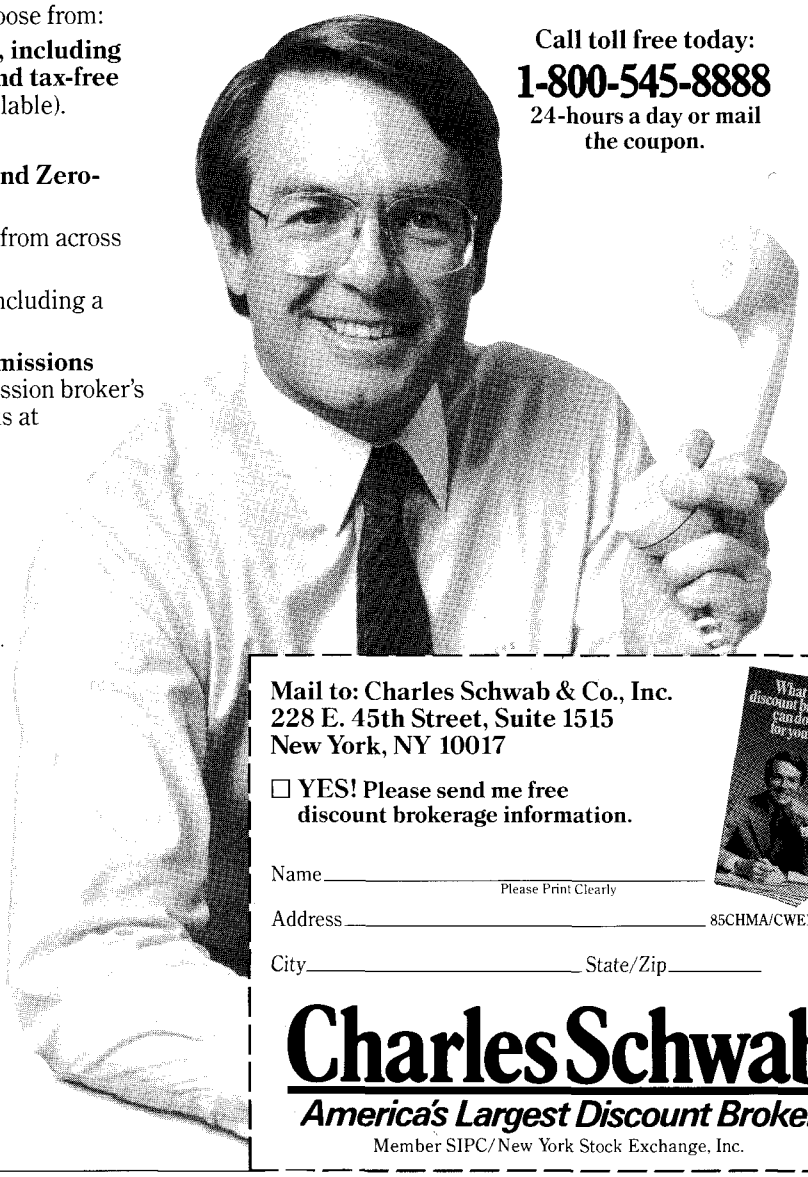

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HOMAGE TO T.S. ELIOT *by Thomas Fleming*

Nineteen eighty-eight is the centennial year of T.S. Eliot's birth, and there is sure to be a flood of tributes to a writer that has changed the course of poetry and criticism and whose reactionary pronouncements on politics and religion have been an inspiration to conservatives of every description. Instead of offering to Mr. Eliot a series of analytical essays exploring his contribution, we are presenting a set of essays — some of them, indeed, on Eliot himself — he might have enjoyed. The two feature essays are the Ingersoll Prize addresses of Octavio Paz and Josef Pieper, both of whom pay tribute to the poet, critic, and philosopher whose works continue to challenge the spirit of the age. This month's perspective was delivered as an address on the occasion of the 1987 Ingersoll Prizes Banquet at the Drake Hotel in Chicago on 5 November.

A Victorian gentleman who happened upon our age by accident would be delighted, in many respects, by what he found here. All the conveniences of life on which men were wont to speculate 100 years ago, we have in superabundance — air ships, undersea boats, devices that send pictures and voices across the globe, and expeditions mounted to explore the solar system. Our proper Victorian would no doubt smile into his beard — delighted that his trust in science had been justified after all.

Indeed, science has transformed the world, but the transformation is more than the bric-a-brac of skyscrapers, miracle drugs, and the science-fiction devices that disturb our quiet. We often hear of modern man's Faustian pact with science. But the author of *Brave New World,* Aldous Huxley, found a more accurate parallel in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In that play, Prospero the magician has created a marvelous world, a life of ease charmed by hidden voices, but he has had to rely upon the witch's son, Caliban, a resentful and rebellious servant we might just as well name Technology. Like Prospero we moderns work wonders, but also like him we risk being deposed and displaced by our subhuman servants. We have changed the face of the world and made it reflect our aspirations. Even time has not resisted our efforts.

We live in a universe of time and space quite different from the world inhabited by either the ancient pagans, who saw time as a wheel, or the not so ancient Christians, who looked towards eternity. As Octavio Paz has written in his most recent book, "The civilization of progress has situated its geometrical paradises not in the world beyond but in tomorrow. The time of progress, technology, and work is the future. The time of the body, the time of love, and poetry is the present moment."

This was not the first time that Mr. Paz has coupled love and poetry in opposition to progress and technology. It has been the aggressive spirit of scientific inquiry that has invaded sphere after sphere of the human spirit. The rewards have been enormous, not only in all those little conveniences of life we have learned to take for granted, but even more in our understanding of the mechanics of the creation. For the first time, we may be in a position to trace the origin of life and of the universe itself. Our scientific studies of the human species and its nearest relatives may soon reveal the secrets of human society, the how and why of power arrangements, the rules of family life, the principles behind all forms of good government.

But there is always a price for these advances in human

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understanding. Like miners in pursuit of subterranean gold, we have turned blooming landscapes of the spirit into slag heaps as poisonous as they are ugly. In our relentless search for knowledge, nothing is spared, nothing is sacred, not even that inner man or woman we think of, from our earliest years, as our real self. Beginning with Freud's first crude attempts, our dreams and unconscious urges have been dissected, classified, and exposed to public comment. Most recently a new self-awareness cult has arisen around the dream, which can now, it seems, be artificially stimulated and exploited for profit and career advancement. There is nothing in our human experience that is to be left unviolated. Readers of Shakespeare will remember that Caliban's crime was his attempt to rape the magician's daughter, a pure and naive virgin.

It is in this context that the giants of modern poetry must be read and understood, as soldiers and rebels in a war for man himself—his soul and mind of course, but also for his imagination and even his body. In such a war strange and unpredictable alliances are made, and we sometimes find ourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with men we have denounced as our worst enemies. How many sermons have been preached against Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the few men who understood the calamity that modern man was bringing upon himself. How much ink has been spilled by traditional critics lamenting the vulgarity of Baudelaire, the obscurity of Mallarmé, the free verse of T.S. Eliot. Indeed, the two American intellectuals closest to Eliot, Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, were both distressed by his poetry, although it was Babbitt who resorted frequently to the phrase "moral imagination" as a means of explaining the serious role played by literature.

It is only in the best poetry of our century—the work of Yeats and Rilke, Eliot and Valéry, and of Octavio Paz—that the human imagination reasserts its full strength in rebellion against all the political and technological forces that would turn us into mere animated computers. It is particularly fitting that a poet should receive a prize named in a poet's honor, and even more so, since Mr. Paz is among the few living poets strong enough to wear Eliot's mantel.

As a social thinker and essayist, Octavio Paz has evolved from a self-proclaimed rebel to a still-rebellious opponent of the political revolution that threatens to turn the world into one vast concentration camp. But for all the virtues of his political essays—especially his brilliant observations on this flawed utopia called America—his real contribution has not been as journalist or philosophical essayist, but as one of those rare explorers of the imagination.

In his poetry, Mr. Paz has continued the work of the surrealists. Like all movements with manifestos and theories, surrealism was destined to destroy itself—how can you prescribe rules for the unconscious mind? But at their best, surrealist poets like Andre Breton offered a challenge to all the little philosophies and pseudosciences which attempt to describe man from the outside in. Real life, the life of poetry and love, is hidden at the center of our existence, impervious to probes and analysts, and it is this real life that Octavio Paz has been exploring in a poetry that has transformed the Spanish language and—for his many readers—has helped to give man back to himself.

It is the real man, the man of imagination and moral choice that is under siege these days. In place of the living, breathing human beings making choices, taking risks, and accepting consequences, the technological view of man has given us so many machines that can be programmed and tinkered with: economic man, sociological man, psychological man, and political man; man the oppressor and man the oppressed; man the capitalist, man the socialist; and above all the modern man and the antiquated man. Estranged from history and each other, we hear a term like "moral imagination" and it strikes our ear like an antique or foreign phrase, now that both morality and the imagination are reduced to psychological phenomena.

A number of philosophers have attempted to recover something of the older sense of moral virtue and human responsibility, but none has worked so tirelessly as Josef Pieper. It is hard to estimate the impact of Dr. Pieper's work. I well remember one of my Greek professors, back in the late 1960's, lending me what he called "an absolutely extraordinary book." That book was, of course, Josef Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture*. It was my wife who lent—or rather gave, since I have never returned it—Pieper's splendid little book on scholastic philosophy. What, I asked my wife, can a man say about scholasticism in so brief a treatment. The answer turned out to be, "more than most intellectual histories that encompass thousands of pages."

There is no living philosopher who writes of such serious topics—virtue, hope, the difficulty of belief, cultural decadence—with Pieper's combination of scholarship and humility. Resisting the temptation to be merely original and refusing to fall into pedantry, he has returned philosophy to that serious but lively conversation in which Socrates and his friends engaged so many years ago.

The object of true moral philosophy has always been man as he is, with all his frailties and timidities, and not the Promethean or utopian man of political dreamers. The great moralists of the past—Aristotle, Cicero, St. Thomas, and Samuel Johnson—all had this in common, a willingness to face the facts about the human race without despairing, and it is to that company that Josef Pieper belongs.

Undeterred by the propagandists of the Third Reich, he wrote his first book to show the impossibility of courage without justice; and equally undeterred by other propagandists, who tell us we have nothing to fear but fear itself, Pieper has patiently explained that fear is not only part of the human constitution, it is also a gift that leads us closer to a sense of reality and, ultimately, to God. "Ethical good," he writes, "is none other than the development and perfection of the natural tendencies of our nature: it is man's natural fear of the diminution and annihilation of his being; its perfection lies in the fear of the Lord."

Fear is as much a part of our nature as love and courage, but the diminution we have most to fear in our time is not mere death, but the mortification of our very being, the hardening of our hearts, the erosion of our imagination, the institutionalization of what our spiritual ancestors called sin. In very different companies and with very different weapons, the two men celebrated by the 1987 Ingersoll Prizes have helped to lead the counterattack against all the forces of dehumanization.

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CEREMONIES IN THE CATACOMBS

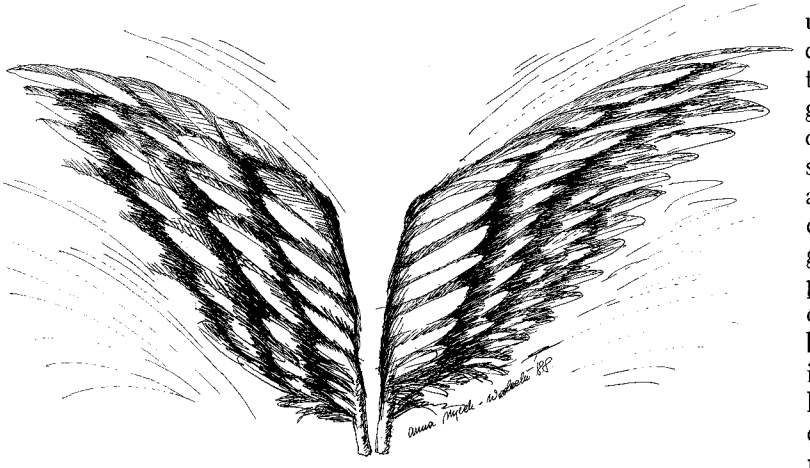
by Octavio Paz

The following is the text of Mr. Paz's address at the 1987 Ingersoll Prizes Awards Banquet.

It moves me to be the recipient of the T.S. Eliot Award, established by The Ingersoll Foundation to honor poets and writers of different languages. The emotion I feel is only natural. Primarily because of the award itself and what it signifies in the realm of contemporary literature: it is an award foreign to those two passions that pervert our culture, ideology and nationalism. Secondly, because of the eminence of my three predecessors: Jorge Luis Borges, Eugène Ionesco, and V.S. Naipaul. And finally, I am moved by the name T.S. Eliot. In all truth, though I mentioned it last, the fact that the award bears the name of the Anglo-American poet is of the utmost significance for me and is both intimate and symbolic. It is more than an award: it is a countersign, a password. I was an adolescent when I read Eliot for the first time, and that reading opened the doors for me to modern poetry; now upon receiving the award that bears his name, I see my life as a long "rites of passage" that leads me back, more than a half a century after my initiation, to one of the masters of my youth.

In 1930 I was 17 years old and eagerly read poetry. In those years a group of Mexican writers edited a literary journal, *Contemporáneos*. The name of the magazine alluded to their intention to open doors and windows so that the fresh air of world culture could enter Mexico. In the August issue of 1930 a long and strange poem appeared, and I read it with awe, bewilderment, and fascination: *The Waste Land*. It was preceded by an intelligent prologue by its translator, a young Mexican poet, Enrique Munguía, who died a few years later. I never knew him, but today I remember his name with gratitude and sorrow. It's not difficult to imagine the puzzlement that this first reading caused me: perplexity but also curiosity, seduction. I read the poem over and over again; I managed to get another translation that had been published in Madrid; I read Eliot's other poems in Spanish versions (in those days there were many translations of his poetry, especially in Mexico). Later, with a fuller grasp of English, I ventured reading him in the original. As the years passed, my image of the poet changed according to both the successive turns in his thought and writing and my own. His image changed, but not my attachment to his poetry. *The Waste Land* is still for me, through so many years and turns, like an obelisk covered with signs, invulnerable to the fluctuation of taste and the vicissitudes of time.

How is it that a Mexican boy fond of poetry should experience such a sudden and lasting passion for a work in English bristling with difficulties? It is hardly necessary to answer the question. The force that pulled me was the excellence of the poem, the rigor in its construction, the depth of its vision, the variety of its parts, and the remarkable unity of the whole. But not just its excellence: its novelty and strangeness as well. The form of the poem was unexpected: the ruptures, the sudden jumps and unforeseen connections, the fragmentary nature of each sequence and the apparent disorder in which they are related (though governed by a concealed coherence), the amalgam of distinct characters and figures, the juxtapositions of time and space—the 20th century and the Middle Ages, Alexandria and London, the fertility rites and the Punic Wars—the combination of colloquial phrases and quotations of religious and poetic texts from the Greek and Sanskrit. The poem didn't resemble any of the poems I had read before. It occurred to me that its true likeness was not in literary works but in modern painting: in a Cubist canvas of Picasso or in a "collage" by Braque. I wasn't wrong. A few years later I discovered that *The Waste Land*'s method of composition—as Pound's *Cantos* and other poems of the period—obeyed the same principles that had inspired the Cubist painters: the juxtaposition of fragments destined to present a pictorial reality never seen before that nevertheless exchanges knowing glances with real reality.



Octavio Paz received the T.S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing on November 5, 1987.

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There is, however, an essential difference between the Cubist painters and the poetry of Pound and Eliot: although the technique is similar, a painting nevertheless *presents* a reality while a poem *tells* a story. Or said another way: a painting is static whereas a poem elapses. Regardless of this, the true origin of this simultaneous manner of representing reality was still Cubist painting. Its first expressions in poetry were the compositions of Apollinaire and Cendrars. Reverdy followed them, but more radical than his predecessors, he suppressed almost all elements of narrative. Pound and Eliot conserved narrative, that is, movement and temporality. Pound declared time and again that this "method of presentation," as he called it, came from the ideograms of Chinese poetry. Whatever the reasons were for that strange declaration—oversight, vanity, Orientalist obsession?—it's clear that the French poets were the initiators and that their example, Apollinaire and his famous poem *Zone* in particular, were decisive for Pound. I know this opinion isn't shared much by English-speaking critics, but it is consoling to remember that the poet Kenneth Rexroth thought the same as I do.

I said before that the novelty of *The Waste Land* explains the fascination it held for me; let me clarify now that when its initial literary and stylistic newness wore off, a novelty of a different nature appeared. A timeless novelty, as it were, because it is a part of the human condition and at the same time is profoundly contemporary.

The innovation of *The Waste Land* isn't in its form as much as it is in the apparition of human history as substance of the poem. Poetry returns to epic. As in all epic, the poem tells a story transfigured by mýth. Furthermore, it's an epic that includes the present age, which is why it is also a film, a news report, a chronicle. In ancient epic the poet vanishes: Homer is not Achilles, nor is Vergil Aeneas; the central character of *The Waste Land*, masked and covert, is the very poet Eliot. (The same thing happens but in a more pronounced way in *The Cantos*.) As in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the hero of *The Waste Land* is an allegory of the human soul, lost in the purgatory of earthly history. The hero of *Zone* isn't unlike Baudelaire's: a poet lost in the city; *The Waste Land*'s hero embodies Western History and its Fall. A fall that is also a psychological depression, a nervous illness, and a mortal sin.

The fusion of the subjective *I* and the historic *we*, that is, the intersection between social and individual destinies, was and is the great novelty of *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos*. The adaptation of a poetic form initiated in France and in which—thanks to the juxtaposition of verbal blocks (presentation and narration are combined)—allowed the two poets to recover the central tradition of the great poetry of the West and, at the same time, give us an image of contemporary reality. Symbolism had expelled history from the poem; with *The Waste Land* the poem returns to historic and concrete time. Time: man as the incarnation of time and the conscience of history.

My fascination with *The Waste Land* didn't blind me as to the incompatibility between my convictions and the ideas and hopes which nourish that poem. All visions of history, including those that positivism has elaborated, contain a metahistory. The one that animates *The Waste Land* was and is in open opposition to my ideas and beliefs, both then and now. Not only did I not feel nostalgia for the medieval Christian order nor did I see in the return to Rome a way to salvation (although I should observe in passing that Eliot stayed halfway back, in the Anglican Church); instead I had broken with my twofold Hispanic American past: the Catholic and liberal traditions. I believed in a universal revolution that would transform society and change man. Both geometries of the future and the wilderness of the beginnings of history seduced me. Nothing farther from Eliot, nothing more foreign and opposed to his thinking than Rousseau and Fourier, the cave of the savage and the voluptuous gardens of the phalanstery. But the fascination persisted. What drove me to *The Waste Land*? The horror of the modern world. Before the disasters of modernity, the conservative and the rebel share the same anxiety:

> Between the idea
> And the reality
> Between the motion
> And the act
> Falls the Shadow

Many years have passed, and my ideas and feelings have changed as our world has. The great victim of the wars and revolutions of the 20th century has been the future. Now at the crossroads of history, no one knows what awaits us: destruction, the night of barbarism, or rebirth. There are signs in the sky of history, but they are blurry; few among us know how to read them, and no one listens to them. Eliot believed in fidelity to tradition and authority; others of us believed in subversion and change. Today we know that spiritual and political health lives in different words, less colored by absolute ideas: the words that founded the Modern Age such as liberty, tolerance, recognition of the other and of others. In short: democracy. I know that modern democracies have been indifferent—and often stupid and cruel—in regard to the art of poetry. Since Romanticism, poetry has been condemned to live in the outskirts of society and even underground. But I also know that such severe and rigorous condemnations as appear in some poems of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Yeats, Pound, and other great poets could only have been written under a democracy.

As the century ends, the marginality of poetry grows. Today it is either a ceremony in the catacombs, a ritual in the urban desert, a fiesta in the basement, or a revelation in the supermarket. It's true that poets are still persecuted in totalitarian countries and in old-fashioned military tyrannies; in democratic nations they are allowed to live and are even protected—except that they are locked within four walls not of stone but of silence. In the affluent societies of the West, dedicated to business and entertainment—or to passing the time, as the indicative phrase says—there is no time for poetry. Nevertheless, the poetic tradition has not been broken, nor will it be. If it were interrupted, the words would wither on our lips and our discourses would once again be the howling of monkeys. The continuity of poetry is the continuity of the human word, the continuity of civilization. Which is why the other name for poetry, in times like ours, is *perseverance*. And perseverance is the promise of resurrection.

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ON CLARITY *by Josef Pieper*

The following is the text of Dr. Pieper's address at the 1987 Ingersoll Prizes Awards Banquet.

It seems to be rather easy to translate "Scholarly Letters" adequately into German. Every year the German Academy for Language and Poetry awards a prize for "*wissenschaftliche prosa*," and what this phrase means is precisely identical with the meaning of "Scholarly Letters." Nevertheless, there is, in this characteristically different wording, a hidden problem. One becomes aware of it once one tries to retranslate the German phrase back into English. Then it might become almost impossible to recognize the "Scholarly Letters" at all: "scientific prose" is obviously quite a different thing! It is, however, exactly this difference which I have in mind to scrutinize a bit, in order to make clear what I feel is the distinguishing mark, the *differentia specifica* of a philosophical language, in contradistinction to the language of science. True, both are languages, of course. But I would dare to name the language of science "terminology"—consisting of terms—whereas the philosopher is speaking a real language, consisting not of terms but of words. And allow me, please, to make a few remarks on the difference between terminology and language.

For decades, logical positivism has been demanding that philosophers use an exact artificial terminology, like the physicists, instead of the supposedly inexact, naturally grown language. It is indeed an advantage of terminology to be more precise than language. But there exists a preciseness that philosophy is unable to bring about, that philosophy cannot even wish to achieve. "Precise" literally means "cut off" and "cut out"—out of the whole of a special event or of a piece of reality. But it is this very whole in which philosophy is explicitly interested. When physicians speak to each other of "exitus," they mean the precise physiological fact that a patient's life is ending. "Exitus" is a term which leaves out everything that is happening in addition to the physiological event whenever a man dies. The "word" of the living natural historical language which corresponds to the term "exitus" is "death." And this word means and names the whole, including the incomprehensible, of what happens in the dying of a human being. Of course, the language of philosophy also has to be clear, and the word "death" is absolutely clear but is not at all precise. Moreover, it is by far richer; it grasps much more reality than even the most precise term can ever do.

T.S. Eliot ironically compares a special well-known kind of modern art with a special kind of philosophy which is eager to imitate the natural sciences; he says the one seems to provide a method of producing works of art without imagination, and the other seems to provide a method of philosophizing without insight and wisdom. The sharpest *dictum*, however, comes from an unexpected side. It is Alfred North Whitehead, the coauthor of the *Principia Mathematica* in his early years, but later a real philosopher in the spirit of the great Western tradition—it is he, who finished his public farewell lecture on Immortality (it was, by the way, the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University)—he finished it with the provocative sentence: "Exactness is a fake."

The difficulty of understanding a book can have remarkably different reasons. I have been told that perhaps only 20 people in the world are capable of understanding the writings of Albert Einstein on the theory of relativity. Here, the difficulty obviously lies in the extreme complicatedness of the subject matter. And so there may be many scientific books which only experts are able to understand. One could possibly also say that the difficulty has to do with the lack of knowledge of the specific terminology. But this terminology, normally based on a conventional agreement among the scientists, can and has to be acquired by learning. And therefore the real obstacle to understanding is not the terminological language itself. Also in philosophy, though only in its "outer court," a special kind of scientific terminology can have its legitimate place. And this terminology too can be acquired by learning; one can and perhaps has to become an expert—again so the language would no longer be an obstacle to understanding. But now we are approaching the border line of a region wherein language itself is the main, if not the only, obstacle to understanding. In his own house, beyond the "outer court" (of, let us say, formal logic or linguistic analysis) the philosopher is dealing with and speaking of matters which by their very nature do not concern experts, but the human being as such, which means everybody. Of course, I do not maintain that everybody would or should be able to grasp, quickly and easily, what philosophers can. On the contrary, there may exist enormous difficulties of understanding, which possibly cannot be overcome by an effort of conceptual thinking but rather only by silent meditation. It remains true, however, that in a genuine philosophical utterance *one* thing is important (and perhaps very demanding): namely, to make perceivable the clarifying and illuminating power of the naturally developed language in such a way that the object of man's search for wisdom, concerning not only experts but everybody, becomes and remains clear. Therefore, the language of philosophy, of the loving search for wisdom, has to be a *plain* language which must not be an obstacle but the vehicle to understanding. It is here, however, in the very center of the philosophical field, where we are facing the phenomenon of a linguistic idiom that is neither terminology nor language but a frightening kind of jargon, an arbitrarily constructed mode of speaking that makes understanding and communication impossible. Strangely enough, the obstacle is nothing but the language itself!

None of my great heroes in philosophy speaks jargon, not even a terminology. All of them—Lao-tse, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas—express whatever they have to say in a *plain* language. This is, by the way, why they are much more readable than their commentators.

Two of those great philosophers—this shall be my concluding remark—Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, both extremely sober and realistic minds, surprisingly speak of an

Josef Pieper received The Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters on November 5, 1987.

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essential affinity and agreement between philosophy and poetry. And this again has to do with the plainness of language. But first of all I have to say what Aristotle and Thomas mean. They mean what they say: Philosophy and poetry are both dealing with what they call the *mirandum*. The *mirandum* means that which gives rise, or which ought to give rise, to astonishment and wonder; it means the non-self-evidency of what seems to be obvious. This idea is based on the conviction that being itself is a mystery—inexhaustible by any language or terminology. And this is one of the ideas that have consequences for the language of philosophy as well. Not that philosophy should use a poetical way of expression; nor that philosophy would be a kind of conceptual poetry. No, the affinity means that the language of philosophy, in spite of its plainness, must not cover up the unfathomability of being, but on the contrary ought to keep it within the range of vision—as poetry also does.

The false mysticism of an arbitrarily constructed jargon as well as the exactness of a pseudo-philosophical scientistic terminology—both are making us forget that the road leading from true philosophy to genuine poetry has already been paved: it is only the water of plain language, by its undemanding simplicity permitting the light to penetrate it to the bottom, that is capable of being changed into the wine of poetry.

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THE SCANDAL IN T.S. ELIOT'S LIFE

by James W. Tuttleton

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), dead now for more than 20 years, continues to vex those for whom his poetry is not complete—or is not completely to be understood—without an intimate knowledge of his biography. At the time of his death, of course, Eliot's reputation was somewhat in decline, despite the Nobel Prize of 1948, the Order of Merit, and many other awards. But during the years that he flourished, his literary authority was so commanding that those irritated by what he had done and what he stood for felt the need to diminish his remarkable achievement once he was gone. Gossip about his life was always a London pastime, but the passing of the great poet sharpened the interest in the story of his life, and more than a few readers still look forward to revelations that will supposedly clarify what is felt to be the hidden scandal of his youth.

James W. Tuttleton is professor of English at New York University.

Certain already-known facts about Eliot's past give a titillating foretaste of the anticipated scandal. It is known, for example, that Eliot broke with his distinguished family in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and that he insisted on living apart from them in London. Why, is not perfectly clear. Then there was the discovery of his King Bolo verses, with their obscene sexual ribaldry. Some of the early poems like "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" were said to suggest that he had prowled the Paris red-light districts, a la Charles-Louis Phillipe's *Bubu de Montparnasse*. Is there a concealed murder somewhere ("Any man has to, needs, to wants to / Once in a lifetime, do a girl in")? Even odder was Eliot's impulsive marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood in 1915, which estranged him even further from his family. Lurid tidbits about this strange marriage were traded by insiders in London. Didn't this vivid and impulsive girl leave Eliot, shortly after the marriage, to seek the counsel (if not sexual comfort) of the priapic Bertrand Russell, who had been Eliot's philosophy tutor at Harvard? He must have been impotent—no? Isn't that the source of his mysterious *aboulie*? Didn't Eliot's exhausting struggle to support the bizarre and frequently ill Vivienne produce that famous nervous breakdown, the psychiatric medical treatment he underwent in a Swiss sanitarium, and the despair of *The Waste Land* (1922)? ("By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept.")

Or was it because he was in love with somebody else? What about those hundreds of letters in the Princeton University library, written to his American friend Emily Hale—closed to inspection until the next century? Was she his lifelong mistress? And wasn't there something secretive and scandalous in his sudden marriage in 1957 to Valerie Fletcher, a woman so much younger than he? And if there's nothing to any of this, wasn't he at least a crypto-fascist who hated American democracy? In the continuous effort to dig something up to downgrade Eliot's reputation as a writer, there have been, in short, many insinuations of scandal, but few surprising revelations.

Eliot, it must be said, indirectly contributed to this appetite for scandal. As his fame grew, he insisted that his poetry was impersonal, indeed, that all great poetry was, or ought to be. And his resistance to inquiry into his private life simply whetted curiosity and led many readers to suppose that some very dark secret, some wonderfully rich and juicy scandal, was hidden in the obscurity of his early years. The manifest element of guilt in his verse and his absolving embrace of Christianity in 1927, together with his prohibition of a biography and of an edition of his letters (so far honored by his widow) made it seem inevitable to some that the life of Eliot, when it was finally and definitively written, would disclose moral horrors that only the despair of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* could adequately express. Since his death, of course, we have had a number of

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biographical studies and some illuminating personal recollections about the man—including Herbert Howarth's *Figures Behind T.S. Eliot*, T.S. Matthews' *Great Tom*, and, most recently, Peter Ackroyd's *T.S. Eliot: A Life*. But such books are "unauthorized," written without the assistance of—and without the information possessed by—Eliot's widow, Valerie; hence, there is still the nagging suspicion that Old Possum indeed had a scandal to hide—one not yet really revealed by any of the literary snoops.

Literary jealousy, political irritation, wounded national vanity, and the human propensity to gossip fuel much of this tongue-clucking. But what this kind of prurience obscures is the real scandal of Eliot's life, the scandal that underlies so much of the effort to reduce his literary achievement to middling proportions. And that scandal was Eliot's conversion to Christianity. While some of his most intimate friends knew of his baptism at the Finstock Church in the Cotswolds on 29 June 1927, Eliot's announcement in the Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) that henceforth his point of view would be "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" had the effect of a bombshell. It is a complicated statement, with many ramifications. But it is the religious scandal that needs to be understood, and understood in the literary context of Eliot's time, if the biographical speculation, still current, is to be grasped in the fullness of its motivation.

Eliot of course was reared in a bland New England Unitarianism, whose principal feature, according to Henry Adams in *The Education*, was the clergy's refusal to insist on any doctrine, believing as they did that "leading a virtuous, useful, unselfish life" was "sufficient for salvation." Since Unitarianism was to Eliot but an amorphous humanism claiming the status of a religion, it is hardly a surprise that he felt himself to have been brought up "outside the Christian Fold," as he told Bertrand Russell in a letter of 22 June 1927. For someone, like Eliot, outside the Christian Fold, there were at least three serious available alternatives: (1) a world view based on naturalistic scientism, which seems to have been the dominant literary viewpoint after 1890—a perspective alien to Eliot's temperament and without adequate intellectual authority for him; (2) Oriental thought, in which Eliot immersed himself for two years, while studying Sanskrit at Harvard—an experience that left him, he said, more mystified than enlightened; and (3) the secular tradition of Western reflective philosophy in which Eliot immersed himself as a graduate student at Harvard, leading, finally, to a doctoral dissertation he called *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*. Given his formal education and his systematic reading and study, his conversion was not an act of ignorance, superstition, or some merely personal guilt. He was one of the most learned, widely inclusive thinkers of the Anglo-American literary milieu. But none of the approaches listed above could make a permanent claim on his intellectual allegiance during the formative years when Eliot was struggling to find a ground for being and a guide for conduct that transcended the skepticism and the ethical relativism espoused by his contemporaries.

Eliot's conversion to Christianity, in retrospect, was a clear line of development more than a decade in the making. Early fugitive poems like "Silence," "Easter," "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," and "The Death of St. Narcissus," written between 1910 and 1915, reflect his intense preoccupation with ultimate questions. Reflection on the nature of God, the longing for the divine, the conflict between the body and soul, the aspiration to sainthood, even the ecstasies of martyrdom as a redemption for the horror of life in a godless, desacralized universe—themes expressed in all these poems—he suppressed as incomprehensible in the literary climate of the time, or as otherwise youthful embarrassments to a proper Harvard man. But what he did express, on the intellectual plane, during these years, was a continuous philosophical argument, culminating in the scandal of his conversion, about whether morals can be grounded on human thought alone, or whether divine revelation, in the form of the Scriptures and the Church, was the necessary foundation.

In reaction to the skeptical scientism of the age, some of his contemporaries had posited a New Humanism derived from what Irving Babbitt, Eliot's Harvard teacher, called "the wisdom of the ages"—a central core of "normal human experience" which found its highest expression, according to Babbitt, in the thought and conduct of Buddha, Christ, Confucius, and Aristotle. The person who embraces such a wisdom, Babbitt argued in *Literature and the American College*, does "inner obeisance to something higher than his ordinary self, whether he calls this something God, or, like the man of the Far East, calls it his higher Self, or simply the Law." As a substitute for "religious obligation" and "religious restraint," this wisdom constituted an "inner check" on the various lusts that afflict man's natural will. "To be modern," Babbitt observed, means "to refuse to receive anything on an authority 'anterior, exterior, and superior' to the individual." John Middleton Murry likewise remarked in "Romanticism and Tradition" that "The foundation of the modern consciousness is this, that the individual man takes his stand apart and alone, without the support of any authority."

But for Eliot any humanism that relied on individual authority or this "inner check" was entirely too optimistic in

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles*:

Ethnic Conflict

"The Swiss do not believe in deficit financing, and they do believe in maintaining the value of the Swiss franc. When foreigners, despite horribly high real estate prices, start buying too much land, the Swiss yell "Ueberfremdung" (overalienation) and prohibit it. They believe in the free market, and have relatively free trade, but they do not believe in allowing themselves to be put out of business or bought out by foreigners."

—from "Pluralism in Miniature" by Harold O.J. Brown

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Autumn Day

by Rainer Maria Rilke

(translated by Alban Coventry)

Lord! It is time. The summer days were full;
Now lay thy shadows on the warm sundials,
And loose the wind upon these grassy isles;
Bid the unfallen fruits ripen and swell;
Grant them just two more days of sunny clime;
Urge them to their perfection and instill
The final sweet into the heavy wine.

Whoever has no house and is alone,
Now builds no more and will alone remain,
Will wake and read and write with tired brain,
And when the last brown leaves are earthward blown,
Will wander, restless, in the falling rain.

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its view of human nature. Babbitt and Murry, like Emerson and Arnold, "had not seen the silhouette / of Sweeney [the natural man] straddled in the sun." The simple fact of human fallibility logically negated the authority of any such an "inner check" and deconstructed every argument for an adequate ethics grounded on human nature alone. He agreed, moreover, with the *Speculations* of T.E. Hulme that man—"essentially limited and imperfect" and "endowed with Original Sin"—can "never himself *be* perfect" because he "is essentially bad" and can only "accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political." Hulme's account of human experience had convinced Eliot that "Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating" and that "Institutions are necessary." And deep immersion in Bradley's *Ethical Studies*—with its empirical effort "to determine how much of morality could be founded securely without entering into religious questions at all"—had taught Eliot (as he observed in "Francis Herbert Bradley") that reflection on morality leads us to "the necessity of a religious point of view." For Eliot, only the Church provided the necessary structure for the institutionalization of religion; the ground of an adequate ethics could be nothing but divine revelation.

In the *Criterion*, which he had begun to edit in 1922, Eliot sponsored an ongoing public debate about the adequacy of humanism, enlisting the arguments of Allen Tate, G.K. Chesterton, and others against the positions of Babbitt, Murry, and Norman Foerster. He was in substantial agreement with Tate, who argued that the New Humanists had no means of validating their values and that, if their values were to be made rational, "the prior condition of an objective religion is necessary." Religion, Tate observed, "is the sole technique for the validating of values." Eliot likewise found the New Humanism "too ethical to be truth." He remarked that he could not "understand a system of morals which seems to be founded on nothing but itself," and he rightly observed that the New Humanist's morals were mostly derived from their own rejected Christian background. For Eliot, a truth *outside ourselves* had to be the foundation of belief and conduct. This truth, he told Bonamy Dobree in a letter of 1927, was contained in "the conception of an immutable object or Reality the knowledge of which shall be the final object of the will." Thus he was irresistibly led toward the Christian conception of God and the necessity of conversion.

That Eliot's conversion sent shock waves through the Anglo-American intellectual and literary community is clearly revealed in the general reaction at the time. A *TLS* reviewer of *For Lancelot Andrewes* complained that by "accepting a higher spiritual authority based not upon the deepest personal experience" but rather upon "the anterior and exterior authority of revealed religion," Eliot had abdicated from his intellectual leadership and rejected "modernism for medievalism." Reflecting later on this review, which had called him "if not a lost leader" perhaps "a kind of traitor," Eliot denied that his Catholicism was "merely an escape or an evasion," or that he viewed his conversion as "a defeat." Eliot told Paul Elmer More that he knew "the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays," but he accepted the burden of supernatural belief without equivocation and with a genuine humility, living its precepts throughout his lifetime. Nothing galled his skeptical critics (and some fellow churchmen) more than his words that "Thought, study, mortification, sacrifice: it is such notions as these that should be impressed upon the young. . . . You will never attract the young by making Christianity easy; but a good many can be attracted by finding it difficult: difficult both to the disorderly mind and to the unruly passions" ("Thoughts After Lambeth").

That the most brilliant poet and learned writer of his time should have submitted himself to the spiritual authority of an institution called anachronistic by his avant-garde contemporaries was indeed the scandal of the time. And it is still the stumbling block to many intellectuals reading his late verse. But whenever has it been otherwise? We have it on the highest authority that Christian belief is foolishness to the world and that faith is a scandal to merely rational thought. But since, as Eliot observed in "Lancelot Andrewes," a Church is to be judged in part by "its intellectual fruits" and by "its monuments of artistic merit," we cannot conveniently ignore the positive role Christianity played in his verse as well as in his life. His conversion, in kindling the faith, thought, and imagination of his mature years, is manifest in those majestic poems and plays like *Ash Wednesday*, "The Gift of the Magi," *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *Four Quartets*. These memorable works give expression to a sensibility wholly delivered from the chaos of ethical subjectivism, on the private level, and, on the public level, from that "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" that Eliot had called secular history. Together with *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (1948), they testify to Eliot's culminating belief that "a Christian world-order, *the* Christian world-order, is ultimately the only one which, from any point of view, will work." Certainly if we contemplate the horrific events of the 20th century—two world wars, innumerable revolutions, terrorism, the holocausts—the old or the New Humanist idea that man is the adequate measure of things seems a cruel piece of romantic folly. But such folly seems more tolerable, to many, than the scandal of faith.

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WHO WAS VLADIMIR NABOKOV?

by Leon Steinmetz

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) is not one of my *most* favorite writers, but then my most favorite writers are Pope and Swift, Dante and Corneille, Goethe and Tolstoy (not mentioning Theocritus, Vergil, and Marcus Aurelius) compared to whom *any* modern writer looks rather like a peculiarly dressed dwarf; however, when Nabokov is accused of some artistic or human sin, I always rush to defend him.

The present essay was prompted, in part, by the newest volume on Nabokov by Andrew Field—*VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov*—the volume which generated hostile reviews from people who consider Nabokov one of the best writers who ever lived, and a favorable reaction from those who think of him as but a juggler of exquisite images and intricate words, a snob with eccentric literary tastes, and an unrepentant political conservative.

The controversy renewed my interest in Nabokov. I reread many of his works and tried to formulate my thoughts on who, after all, Vladimir Nabokov was.

* * *

In 1923, a year after his father was assassinated, 24-year-old Nabokov wrote these lines to his grieving and devastated mother:

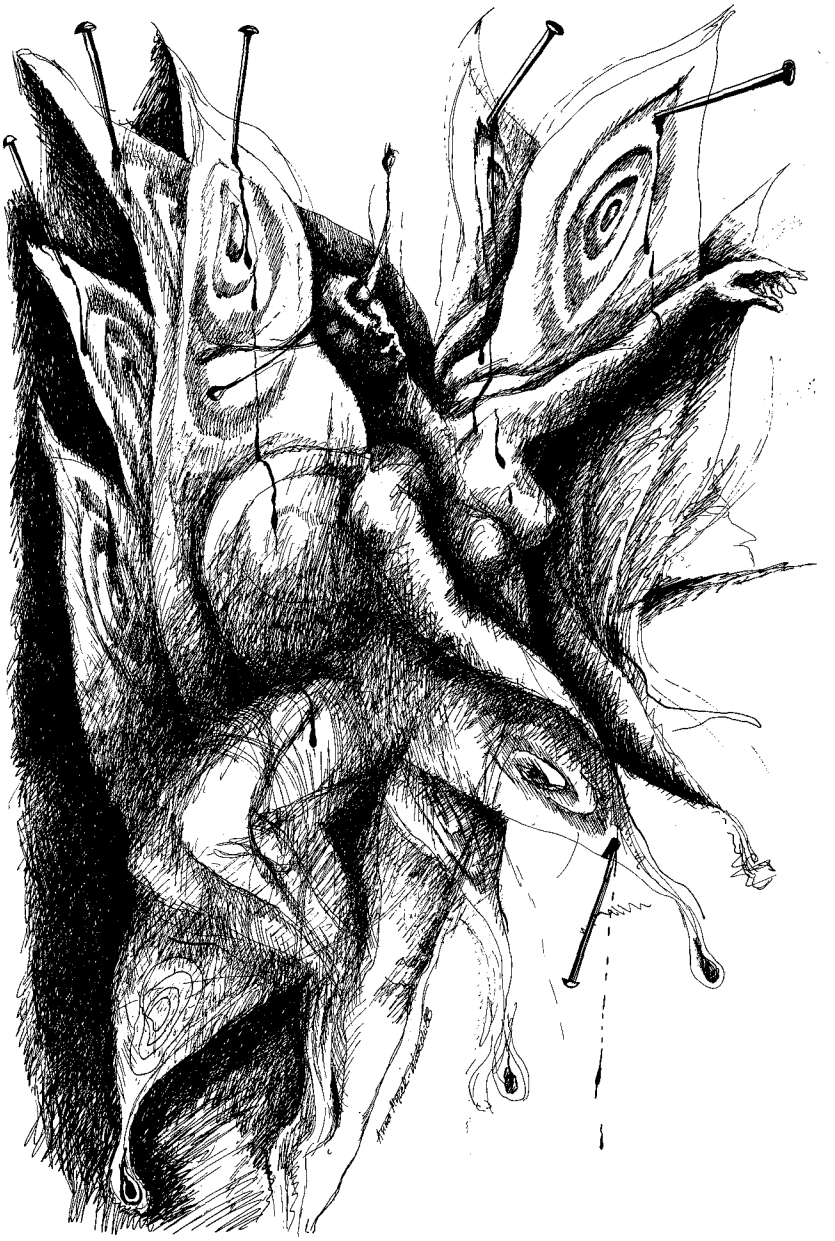
> . . . We shall again see him, in an unexpected but completely natural paradise, in a country where everything is radiance and finesse. He will walk toward us in our common bright eternity, slightly raising his shoulders in the way that he used to do, and with no surprise at all we shall kiss the birthmark on his hand. You must live in expectation of this tender hour . . . and never give yourself over to the temptation of despair. Everything will return. In the way that in a certain time the hands of the clock come together again . . .

The real personality of the author of *Ada*, *Lolita*, and *The Gift*, so cleverly concealed in his masterly crafted novels, is laid bare in the lines of this letter.

Nabokov occasionally gave the impression of being arrogant, aloof, snobbish. But this impression was utterly misleading. A great actor, a great inventor, and a great imitator, he liked playing games with our contemporary world. The world in which a jar of liquid labeled "Artist's Sweat" (probably real "artist's" sweat) is bought and then exhibited by a major art museum as a genuine art object; the world where music performed in a metropolitan symphony hall might consist of the screech of a grand piano being hauled across the stage and the heavy breathing of the workers pushing it; the world in which some incomprehensible, rambling lines conceived under the cloud of hashish are often hailed as a great poetic discovery.

Elaborately careful not to reveal himself to this world's cynical sneer, Nabokov played with it the only games it could understand and admire—clever, contrived, and glittering cold. This is why the classical naturalness, refined simplicity, and profound religious conviction of his letter would so rarely find their way onto the pages of his novels.

In his literary tastes Nabokov was a classicist—preferring Tolstoy over Dostoevsky or Turgenev over Maupassant—while as a writer he was, obviously, a modernist. It was because (paradoxical as it may sound) his attitude toward literature was much more serious and profound than toward his own writing. Of course he enjoyed writing tremendously, and, of course, it was the center of his life, but still, writing for him was a game, a puzzle, a chess problem; and he played with it as, in a way, a child would play with an



Leon Steinmetz's latest contribution to Chronicles *was "Thoughts on Mikhail Bulgakov" in our January '88 issue. His essays have appeared in* Commentary *and* National Review. *He teaches creative writing at Harvard.*

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elaborate set of electric trains. He readily admitted it. "I have no general ideas to exploit," he once said, "I just like composing riddles with elegant solutions." And here, it is not the words "general ideas" which should alert us (after all, what great writer except, perhaps, the later Tolstoy would openly proclaim his concern for "general ideas") but the word "riddles." Because there is no important master who so proudly (and sincerely!) would declare his preoccupation with riddles to be the major thrust of his creative effort. And it is precisely this riddle-ridden texture of Nabokov's prose which is the source of both its charm and its weakness.

"I think," Nabokov wrote, "that the meaning of the writer's art lies in this: to portray ordinary things as they will be reflected in the flattering mirrors of future times, to find in them that fragrant tenderness which our descendants will feel in those far-off days when every trifle of our daily life will become in itself beautiful and festive, in those days when a person who has put on the very plainest sort of jacket that we wear today will be at once attired for a country masquerade."

This jacket of Nabokov's, in some nostalgic, melancholic and, I dare say, slightly amateurish way, reminds one of the elegant jackets and exquisite neckties Nabokov's dashing father liked to wear in the Duma—Russia's embryonic Parliament—where he, a Duma deputy and brilliant political amateur, gave long, fiery, but irrelevant speeches, while the Bolsheviks—those hard-faced professionals—were digging trenches under the edifice of the Russian Empire.

The linguistic games Nabokov plays are, in a way, like the games played by the small boy Kay from H.C. Andersen's tale *The Snow Queen*—the endless games which consisted of assembling intricate sentences from pieces of ice.

Perhaps the most striking contrast to Nabokov's fiction is the prose of the writer Nabokov-the-critic admired so much—Anton Chekhov. In Chekhov's stories (not his plays, which are weaker) even the most extravagant and unusual seems absolutely natural, while in Nabokov's, the most usual and mundane often seems heavily contrived.

Thus in his short story *Christmas* a father is sitting in the room of his recently deceased son. Shattered, depressed, he sorts out his son's things, when suddenly he hears a strange sound. His son had been a lepidopterist and now one of the cocoons in his collection hatches, and a beautiful butterfly emerges, flapping its wings.

How incomparably more moving the same idea of death overcome is expressed in Nabokov's letter to his mother!

Or his short story *Bachman*, about a liaison between a neurotic pianist Bachman and a lame married woman, Perova. When their platonic liaison is finally consummated physically, Perova dies. The story concludes with the following author's (*Nabokov's*) comments: "I think this was the sole happy night in the whole of Perova's life. I think that these two, a semi-demented musician and a dying woman, discovered during this night words which the greatest poets of the world have not dreamt of." A passage like this speaks for itself. One can only add that reading it, one wants to crawl under his chair.

But these are Nabokov's short stories. In his novels, where he has more "space," Nabokov's *real* voice could be heard more often. Thus, in *Pnin*, whenever Nabokov speaks about something which truly touches him, all the forced humor, all the parochialism of an émigré novel, all "riddles" and literary "chess problems" suddenly disappear, and his voice once again sounds natural and transparent. And you immediately forgive him the neurotic pianist Bachman and a married woman Perova for one sentence when he speaks about Pnin's first sweetheart—Mira Belochkin.

"In order to exist rationally, Pnin had taught himself, during the last ten years, never to remember Mira Belochkin . . . because one could not live with the thought that this graceful, fragile, tender woman with those eyes, that smile, those gardens and snows in the background, had been brought in a cattle car to an extermination camp."

And when in a sentence like this Nabokov includes a little wordplay, naming the girl Belochkin (which phonetically is very tender to a Russian ear, and which also means a little squirrel), then all "those gardens and snows in the background" acquire a still additional dimension.

An interviewer once observed that whenever he mentioned to Nabokov Nazism and Nazi atrocities, Nabokov reacted very emotionally. "I will go to those German camps and look at those places and write a terrible, terrible indictment!" he exclaimed passionately. Nazism and Nazi atrocities touched and disturbed Nabokov immensely. But what separated him from many other Western intellectuals was that he felt exactly the same about Communism and Communist atrocities. He saw no real distinction between Nazism and Communism. Subscribing fully to Orwell's dictum that people who claim there is a substantial difference between Nazism and Communism most often are in sympathy with either one or the other, and that only those who realize that there is no difference between the two are ready to stand against both, Nabokov, the true humanist, stood firmly against both.

At Wellesley College, where he taught off and on between 1940 and 1947, Nabokov openly expressed his feelings toward Stalinism, which prompted the college president—a certain Miss McAffee—to order him "not to make these remarks about Soviet Russia." Nabokov refused, which contributed significantly to his financial hardship and, eventually, cost him his teaching job at Wellesley, where, as he recalled, he "was happiest of all."

All his life—from his first émigré days in Berlin to his celebrity years in Switzerland—Nabokov never changed his attitude toward the Soviet Union. Unlike many Western intellectuals of Russian descent, he didn't change it when, at the beginning of the Second World War, the Soviets were losing to the Nazis; and he didn't change it later, and always rebutted them, when, at the peak of Brezhnev's detente, they were making overtures toward him and tried to invite him to visit the Soviet State. "More vodochka (diminutive for vodka) dear Vladimir Vladimirovich?" Nabokov would mock an imaginary KGB operative who, pretending to be a writer (actually, there are quite a few of those in the Soviet Union who are both, and it is hard to say which one is their hobby—writing or KGB work) would try to make him drunk at some party thrown in Nabokov's honor in Moscow or in Leningrad.

In the West, Nabokov's unwavering resentment of the Soviet State, as one critic noted, "won him few friends in our literary establishment." Some attempted to educate

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him. Thus, Edmund Wilson, who *was* Nabokov's true friend till the publication of *Lolita* catapulted Nabokov into stardom and wealth, presented him with a copy of *To the Finland Station* with the inscription: "To Vladimir Nabokov in the hope that this may make him think better of Lenin." With Nabokov, however, such hopes were bound to fail.

Nabokov never truly belonged to the place he lived. He was always a foreigner. But he was a foreigner in the best sense of the word. He was a learned, elegant European for the Americans, an intriguing, mysterious Russian for the Europeans, and he was (and still is!) that romantic, pioneering American for the Russians. He was that kind of a foreigner upon whom the natives look with the feeling of admiration and slight envy. They look at him with envy because they know he was there, where they could never hope to be, and he knew that which they could never hope to know.

Nabokov often signed his books and his letters with a little drawing of a butterfly. For someone else such a habit would have been a pretentious pose—for Nabokov it was a heartfelt gesture.

People who met him often mentioned the amazing childishness of his expressions. It was because Nabokov, till the end of his days, remained essentially that same vigorous and brilliant little boy for whom his parents created a paradise of a childhood which he never wanted to leave. After all, what was this—his hobby, his love, his obsession with chasing butterflies all over the world? Crisp, blue mountains, lush meadows, and multicolored butterflies fluttering over your head. It is childhood in the best of its manifestations. It is paradise condensed into the image of angels dancing on the tip of a needle.

Nabokov was a world authority on lycaenidal butterflies, his particular specialty being butterflies' genitalia, and he would spend hours vivisecting and examining them—these tiny sclerotic particles—for his scientific papers. And with the same perfect detachment, clinical sterility, and amused interest with which he examined butterflies' sexual organs, he analyzed the sexual mores of contemporary man. This is why all the seemingly explicit passages in his novels (including *Lolita* and *Ada*) are so "clean" and absolutely *non*-pornographic. In addition, because of Nabokov's sense of humor and his strong distaste for Freud, in *Lolita*, for instance, the Freudian thesis of fathers wanting to sleep with their daughters, as F.W. Dupee perceptively observed, "ridiculed itself out of existence."

* * *

In his life Nabokov was guided by a simple principle, which, once again, he formulated in a letter.

"I have reached the original conclusion that if one performs at least one good act per day (even if it is nothing more than giving one's place to an elderly person on the tram) life becomes exceedingly more pleasant. In the final analysis everything in the world is very simple and founded upon two or three not very complicated truths."

So who was Vladimir Nabokov? One of the greatest writers who ever lived? Probably not. But a brilliant man infinitely fascinated with linguistic riddles and "chess problems"; a curious lepidopterist who studied men and their idiosyncrasies the same way he studied butterflies under the magnifying glass of his microscope; a profound thinker forever puzzled by many intellectuals' infatuation with totalitarian regimes; and a highly sensitive writer who understood human follies and who was often willing to forgive them—all these and more, he most definitely was.

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REINTERPRETING PHILOSOPHY

by Thomas Molnar

To paraphrase a well-known saying, We are all revisionists now! Yet somehow even our revisionists are timid—they wait for favorable winds before they "revise" history, economics, philosophy, and science, then write books about "how it really started," "how it really happened." I suspect that revisionism is a branch of popularized hermeneutics whose self-assigned function is to place under suspicion every human enterprise, in the name of other enterprises that are above suspicion: Darwin's, Freud's, Nietzsche's, Marx's, Heidegger's are never suspected themselves. Theirs are the unquestioned *idola fori*.

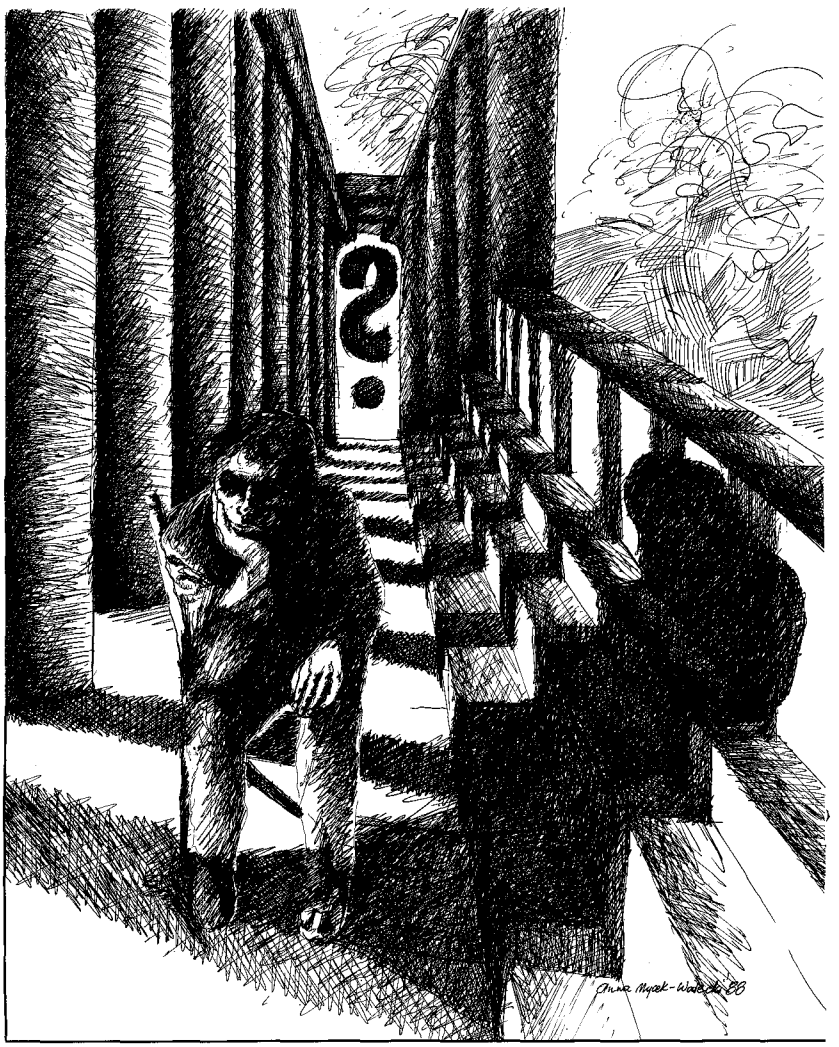
Parallel to the fashionable revisionism, as conformist as other intellectual novelties, there is a quieter variety which indeed allows us to take a new look at past, therefore also at present, situations and movements. What I have in mind is the painstaking restudy of the philosophical enterprise whose unity of inspiration we take so easily for granted, from Thales to Sartre. No detergent or toothpaste is so routinely praised as our "Western philosophical heritage," as if the unity of our heritage were a verifiable and justifiable conclusion. If pressured, we acknowledge that Plato and Aristotle are vastly different in presupposition, method, and world view, and also that Stoics, Skeptics, Epicureans, Cynics, Neo-Platonists further enlivened the scene. We might also concede that philosophy after Augustine and Boethius became "theology's handmaiden" and that Descartes, *et al.* launched new postulates; yet we stubbornly insist that Western philosophy has been one long speculative twine never pulled any way but forward.

There is, however, new thinking on the matter, which—unspectacular and superficial as the various deconstructionisms—has not received a great deal of attention from the academic dandies. This genuine revisionism—genuine because it is documented inquiry, not merely sudden inspiration and semantic interpretation—is based on the exhaustive rereading of the Ancients' works. What was found in them is a spirituality that has been occulted by at least three centuries of excessive intellectualism. In my own rereading, I was both right and wrong with my book *God and the Knowledge of Reality*, published 15 years ago. The argument there correctly distinguished two lines of Western philosophical speculations, the *discursive* and the *absolute* knowledge, the first represented by Aristotle, Thomas, Leibnitz, *et al.*, and the second by Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, perhaps Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, and others. Unconsciously I was inclined toward Bergson's dichotomy between those who *intuit* reality and those who measure it; but while Bergson gave his preference to the intuitive type of knowledge, I argued, in order to "save reason" and the reasoning way to God, in favor of the primacy of the second kind.

In the light of recent revisionism I was not blatantly wrong, but was content with an incomplete grasp of things. No wonder; we have been accustomed to philosophical systems announcing their color through a kind of philosopher's calling card, with epistemology, logic, metaphysics, ethics, and politics written on it, one following from what preceded. Any thinker not able to display the five "philosophical disciplines" under one canopy was a dilettante like Pascal or Nietzsche, the guiltier since in their times philosophy was no longer a servant of theology but a master of the university. By the 18th century, the philosopher had to be a Herr Doktor Professor, or he was undeserving of the name. Needless to say, philosophy is today shattered by over-intellectualization, and some of the *disjecta membra* are called phenomenology, linguistic analysis, existentialism, structuralism. It is not necessary to put things back together to justify a new perspective.

The new perspective may be summed up by mentioning the title of Pierre Hadot's new book, *Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy*. Hadot is teaching at the College de France, founded in the 16th century as a focus of high

Thomas Molnar is visiting professor of religious studies at Yale University and the author of The Pagan Temptation *(Eerdmans).*



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learning, a place where Bergson used to teach. The thesis is that Greek thinkers understood their function not as schoolmasters but as therapeutes of the soul. Rather than speak of the "unity of Western philosophy," we might, without denying this aspect of speculation, add to it an aspect of discontinuity, the break occurring by the 12th century when Scholastics, later the Cartesians, turned philosophy into science. The speculative enterprise up to the year 1000 or so was not primarily scientific; it was also a way of calming the soul through meditation, discipline of soul and body (to avoid devastation by passions), and exercise. We tend to shrug off yoga, but our rejection is justified when we understand yoga's character as a spiritual athleticism; we should reject the emptiness, the objectlessness, but not the therapeutic aspect itself. For the Greek philosophers the moral content was always present while leading the soul to the understanding of the cosmos and to peace. What is Plato's teaching if not the apprenticeship of the Logos and the guiding of the soul away from the sensory world? Plato was not very far removed from certain conclusions of Oriental wisdom, yet he profoundly recast it because while Oriental wisdom directs the vision toward absorption in Nothingness, Plato turns to pure thought and conversion to the Good.

The outstanding thinkers of Hellas elaborated their own *paideia*, not of course for youth but for the mature man who educates his soul in view of the soul's adjustment to the essence of the universe. This essence varied from Plato to the Stoics to the Epicureans: it was interpreted as the Good, the *nous*, reason or cosmic harmony, but all—the Academy, the Stoa, the Gardens—were united in adopting and teaching a way of life. Disciples did not join in order to learn things new—as the modern school defines the teacher's and student's task—but to hear further refined arguments why the chosen way of life was wise and practicable. This is why we find mature men around Socrates, thinkers and politicians, who do not wish to *learn* but to penetrate more deeply into the practice of the good life and to acquire dialectical skills in the defense of their world view.

The chief works of Greek philosophy, those we now buy in paperback and write term papers about, were spiritual exercises, Hadot argues. They were meant to lead souls, the way Hermes, as a *psychopompos*, led souls, namely to the realm of death. Death here does not mean the Hindus' self-annihilation; it means apprenticeship in the demands of the spirit which gradually conquers the body and its passion-derailed will. It is a transfiguration, an overcoming—neither an ascesis nor a frenzy. Even in search of wisdom, the Greek mind aspired to harmony and measure. Plato formulated it with great precision in the *Republic*: "[The wise man only goes to sleep] after awakening his reasonable part and nourishing it with fair thoughts. . . . Only after having calmed the sensual and irascible parts of his being . . . does his soul attain truth."

Wisdom can be reached through training, a training well-directed toward universal reason (Marcus Aurelius) or toward the contemplation of the One in a mystical act (Plotinus). In the ancient Greek school (the term derived from *schola* is of course out of place here) the therapeute's dogma and methodology were not discussed because to adhere to philo-sophy, to philosophize, was to be converted to this dogma and method. This is why the fundamental doctrine and the way of life derived from it did not change within one school over the centuries. The disciple who found his passions becalmed at the feet of Pythagoras, Plato, Zeno, or Epicurus saw no motivation to probe in other directions—except perhaps Aristotle, who rejected his master's doctrine and method completely! But then to be an Aristotelian was already to become a man of science, not a sage.

Ancient philosophy was therefore anything but what *we* understand by philosophy. First, it could not be learned from books; it was rather an *imitatio* through the living word and through example. A more interesting case than Plato's discipleship in the Socratic circle was, perhaps, the nondiscipleship of Alcibiades, who understood the Socratic truth but was unable (that is unwilling, too possessed by passion) to imitate the way of life. Medieval Christians would say that his concupiscence was stronger than his "fair thoughts." We do not, therefore, speak of Alcibiades as a disciple of Socrates; at best he was a distant and jealous admirer.

It follows that the ancient philosopher taught orally, not through books. Discipleship was achieved by listening to the living word—listening not individually but in a group, or rather in a community, and in view not of knowledge but of spiritual progress. "Plagiarism" as we understand it did not matter; the utilization of long-accepted formulas, obvious from the reading of the philosopher's lives in Diogenes Laertius, was licit; they were only adapted to different situations.

It is fairly evident that religion in Hellas was an affair of external manifestations, of cold ceremonies addressed to tribal-cultic deities, objects of magic manipulations, supplications, gratitude. What *we* call religion, that is conversion to an insight, a way of life, a grace touching us, was the business of philosophy—internal conversion, the turning of the soul, but also, as in our religious life, a consciousness that life is limited and that the art of dying well requires good habits from the soul, a technique of inner life and the soul's movements. Whether for Platonism or the Stoics, the good life and readiness before death were obtained by liberation from individual anguish and a passage to a universal perspective wherein the self is transcended in the direction of a totality. Let us observe that this is emphatically not what Christianity understands by religion, the good life, and salvation. Not a word of good works, charity, love of fellowmen, except as a consequence of self-controlled behavior and avoidance of passion. Let us not entertain, therefore, the error that one can step back and forth between Greek philosophy and the Christian religion, or that Socrates was an alter ego of Christ. Plato's spirituality was a huge step away and above what Hindus, for example, understand by this term. But it is not religion in our sense.

If we adopt these views about ancient Greek philosophy as plausible and borne out by a careful reading of the documents, we are obliged to rethink the current position and conclude that there was indeed a break somewhere along the "Western" history of speculation. Hegel's dialectics is the first to be dismissed, namely that the philosophy of history is contained in the history of philosophy. Other formulations do not fare much better. They are flawed because they posit the same problematics uninterrupted

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Quartet (Quarteto)

by Octavio Paz

(translated by Michael Schmidt)

Ore, fermate il volo
e, carolando intorno
a l'alba mattutina
ch'esce de la marina,
l'umana vita ritardate e'l giorno.
—*Tasso*

I.
KNOWN yet always strange, the lie of the land,
the riddle of the palm of one's own hand.
The ocean sculpts in each wave, stubbornly,
the monument in which it falls away.
Against the sea, a will that's turned to rock,
the faceless headland keeps the sea in check.
The clouds: they are inventing sudden bays
—where a plane is a barque that melts away.
The rapid scribbling of the birds above
—others are fishing where the water moves.
Between the sea-foam and the sand I tread,
the sun is resting light upon my head:
between what's static and what will not stay
in me the elements enact their play.

II.
THERE are tourists also on this strand,
death in a bikini, death with jewelled hand,
there are rumps and bellies, loins, lungs, thighs,
a cornucopia of bland enormities,
a scattered abundance that precedes
the meal of ashes where the worm will feed.
Adjacent, yet divided by those lines
strictly kept but tacit, undefined,
are vendors, and the stalls where fries are sold,
and panders, parasites, untouchables,
the rags of poor men and the poor man's bones.
The rich are stingy while the poor man fawns:
God loves them not, nor do they love themselves:
'each does but hate his neighbour as himself.'

III.
THE wind breaks forth and gathers up the grove,
the nations of cloud disperse above.
The real is fragile, wavering, unsure
—also, its law is change, it does not tire.
Round and round the wheel of seemings spins
upon a fixity: the axis time.
Light sketches all and then turns all to flame,
with daggers that are brands it stabs the main
and makes the world a pyre of mirrorings:
we are mere white horses of the sea.
It's not Plotinus's light, it's earthly light,
a light of here, but it is thoughtful light.
It brings, between me and my exile, peace:
my home this light, its shifting emptiness.

IV.
TO wait for nightfall, I have stretched myself
under the shadow of a throbbing tree.
The tree is a woman in whose leaves
I hear the ocean roll beneath noon heat.
I eat her fruits that have the taste of time,
fruits of forgetfulness, fruits of wisdom.
Beneath the tree, the images and thoughts
and words regard each other, touch.
Through the body we return where we began,
spiral of stillness and of motion.
To taste, to know—it is finite, this pause:
it has beginning, end—is measureless.
Night enters and it rolls us in its wake;
the sea repeats its syllables, now black.

---

through 25 centuries and because they read backwards into that chronicle the evolution of system-formation from Thales to Wittgenstein and Ricoeur.

Another by-product of the "revisionist" view is the rehabilitation of religion as an enterprise in which the greatest minds of the West engaged. If, from Augustine to Gilson, it is said that one cannot philosophize without taking religion into account, we have Plato's confirming testimony that the philosopher must have fair thoughts and live a good life in order to qualify.

This would leave our academic philosophers and Ph.D.'s out on a limb and would mean that they are unable to teach their discipline because it cannot be learned from twice-a-week courses or from so-tagged Great Books. Our students want an A, in philosophy not less than in home economics, and are not ready to devote their lives to *sophia* unless she is a pretty coed.

But let us draw a more substantial lesson. It is not relativism to say that things change according to the viewer and the perspective—in our case, that philosophy is not the search for truth but a personal conversion because, obviously, the disciple of Plotinus had little in common with the adept of Epicurus. Only through this wider grasp can we advance to the overall ideal of ancient philosophy: finding among the itineraries of conversion the privileged one, the *via recta*. Yet the last thing that the post-Kantian era, in which we are still orbiting, would suppose is that spiritual exercises (Hadot refers to those of Ignatius of Loyola) were at the heart of Greek wisdom. Our philosophy lessons usually begin with the Cartesian *cogito* or, nowadays, with the structure of language which is said to determine it. At any rate, the modern student's first encounter with philosophy is a thorough skepticism in regard to the outside world, as well as to his own existence. *Cogitur* (it thinks) is the watchword three centuries after Descartes. How does it feel for student and professor to be told that the gray plaster busts of Greek sages do not hide iconoclastic inquiries, but ways of going beyond mere self and seeking out the Good?

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EXECUTION *a story by Momcilo Selic*

Vukota Vlahovic said to his mother, "I am a grown man."

But his mother just smiled. "You are a boy until you marry. Even then you will be my son."

"God be with you," she said, as he walked away without looking back.

His pouch filled with bread and cheese, Vukota Vlahovic went down Trmanje, watching the birds and the hares.

He descended to the Dead Man's Vale and crossed the River of the Dead. Its pale blue waters almost touched his soles as he shuffled over the planks. He threw a pebble into the water, and the fish scrambled, their bellies silver.

Then he climbed, high, past Hazelhut, along the smaller Gorge. He could hear the River of the Dead gushing out of the mountain.

Twin white jets, twice as tall as a man, formed the river outright; Vukota crawled away from the Rim and rose, brushing away the pine needles and moss. He walked briskly, through an airy forest.

* * *

By noon, he reached the Grand Vale and lodged with his cousins, the Pizurice. He had to stuff himself once more, while his aunt said to him, "Watch out for the Niksici, they've been under the Turks too long. May God watch over you." And she made the sign of the cross over him.

The next dawn he climbed out of the Vale, passed the Captain's Lake and walked towards Nisa's Marker. The plain, high in the mountains, was flat and yellow, deserted like a battlefield. Silence pressed upon him, as did the purple clouds and the opaque, purple water he was leaving.

* * *

In Niksic, King Nicholas cried to the assembled students, "We need men to bring literacy to Montenegro! Your duty will be as honorable as anyone's in the army!"

Vukota looked at the other students, and their faces were also glum.

* * *

In 1912, the long columns of Rovcani crossed the White Mountain and reached the Lim. There, the Vasojevici

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joined them.

"Aye!" someone shouted and thousands threw their caps in the air, thundering, "Hurrah!" after the Serdar reviewed them.

With his scimitar, the Serdar pointed across the river and the men cheered and stomped towards the fords. Soon, their red vests choked the river, churned by shot and rifle fire. The Montenegrins scrambled up the other bank and raised a cloud of dust over the Turkish redoubts.

* * *

As the Highlanders advanced through Moslem villages, the boys eyed them with hatred, while veiled women hid in their houses.

"No looting," the Brigadier said.

* * *

In a village near Pec, at the dusk of a long, dusty day, a company of Vasojevici were fired upon and six soldiers killed.

The Vasojevici made a search of the houses and flushed out two score disheveled Albanians.

Without much ado the Vasojevici Brigadier ordered them shot.

* * *

"The mace!" the Brigadier shouted, and volleys cut the Albanians down.

The cries of their kin, huddled behind a hill, sounded to Vukota like Montenegrin grieving. He could see many tribesmen pale, yet no one broke ranks.

The Brigadier then came upon the crowds of noncombatants and had them driven into Small River. The women held their babies high but the Brigadier ordered them dipped into the water. Steam rose above the river, and wisps of snow came with the norther.

"Father," Mace roared to the priest, "I want you to baptize the heathen!"

The priest stood on the whitening bank, snow collecting on his hair and beard, and held his cross high. "In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I welcome you all into the fold of the Holy Orthodox Church! Amen!"

"Amen!" cried the Montenegrins, Vukota among them. The soldiers wept and shivered just like the Shqipetars in the Sitnica.

* * *

"Out!" bellowed the Mace and the women ran shrieking out of the shallows and over the hill, where their dead lay. The wind was turning into a blizzard; barefoot women ululated and fell over their executed husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers.

"Move!" ordered the Mace, and the Montenegrins marched.

* * *

They took Djakovica by storm and met with the Serbians. The soldiers milled about the town and thronged the cafés. Vukota heard a Rovcanin sing,

All morning long,
Small River ran red and muddy,
Past noon,
It carried men and horses!

"Glory, glory to Serbdom!" shouted the soldiers in the café. They drank their brandy in strong, anxious gulps and began breaking the pitiable furniture, roaring with fury.

* * *

The gray columns of Serbians marched off to a military band, their ranks swinging in heavy step.

"Oh Serbia!" sang a voice, above the creaking of leather and the clinking of canteens and scabbards.

The Serbians sang, until their thick battalions disappeared in the dusk.

* * *

The one-time Turkish barracks stank of urine, excrement, cadaver, and rats. But, the planks were scoured with boiling water and lye, the rats poisoned, the walls whitewashed with lime, and the floor smeared with carbolineum. First students came by Christmas, pallid with hunger.

"Good luck," said the Brigadier to Vukota. "You'll need it, upon this accursed Plain."

* * *

"Oh Vukota," sang the Montenegrins, "may the sun shine upon your house! Cheers to the newlyweds!"

"Go forth," said the priest, "and repopulate this land!"

Vukota and his bride blushed and laughed, while the guests pulled their Gassers out of their sashes, and fired them in the air.

"Glory!" they shouted. They laughed and sang while the students settled down to suckling pig and cornbread.

* * *

Rain fell upon the town, miring the hovels and the few buildings the Turks had left behind. Cold wind howled from the mountains as Vukota and Catherine Vlahovic sat behind the windows of their house, watching the main street.

Then the sun came: fissures spread like lesions through the rich, dark earth outside Djakovica. A pall of dust hung over the town, glinting with straw and lint.

"Salaam, Schoolmaster, Sir!" said the Albanians to Vukota in the market.

* * *

When the Serbians came again in 1915, their columns were endless and each man was gray, beyond the color of his uniform. Lines of refugees and beasts spread across the plains, trudging through muck. The Shqipetars disappeared, as Djakovica heaved.

"We must take to the road ourselves," said the Town Commandant to Vukota.

* * *

More refugees joined the retreat at Pec and the Montenegrins rode through the Rugovo Gorge, their rifles at ready. High above them, the jagged, gray ridges lay bare; no hawks, eagles, or osprey specked the sky.

Slate-like, Sitnica rolled thick and silent; loose stone plunked into its pools.

They came out of the Gorge into a blizzard, their horses slipping in the fresh snow.

* * *

At Mojkovac, the Serdar shouted to the mustered men, "King Nicholas has surrendered! Whoever wants to, can go home!"

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The Highlanders, drawn up in uneven, frozen ranks above the plain, merely looked at him.

"With God's help then, let us avenge our shame! Christ is Born!" cried the Serdar.

"Indeed He is Born!" shouted the Montenegrins and held up their long, Russian rifles.

* * *

Vukota watched the Austro-Hungarians advance through the drifts, shouting. Their skirmishers lay in the snow, then rose up again, as other lines of blue-clad soldiers took their place.

The Montenegrins waited in silence until the Brigadier commanded, "Knives only!" and unsheathed his yataghan.

Blue steel in hand, the Highlanders plunged upon the enemy.

* * *

Four years after the Battle of Mojkovac, gaunt from Hungarian captivity, Vukota stroked his son's head.

The boy looked down, as did Vukota's mother, and Catherine.

"Your sister's gone," said Vukota's mother. "A Serb from Bosnia, an Austrian soldier, took her with him."

Pulling out the large, blunt bullets, Vukota handed his Gasser to Markan. "Were they married?" he said.

"Yes," said the boy. "Otherwise, we would've starved."

"Better that we did!" said Vukota's mother.

* * *

"Nobody smiles like Vukota Vlahovic," said the Highlanders.

Dressed in a dark suit, gold watch chain glinting from his waistcoat, Vukota strolled in the market, gently greeting the passersby.

"Oh Vukota," cried a peasant, "can memories keep anyone, or anything alive?"

* * *

In the fall of 1919, a platoon of gendarmes of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes rode into Kolasin, five of their horses draped with bundles.

With the rest of the townsmen, Vukota came to the market, keeping his distance from the mounted policemen. In the drizzle he could see blood trickle down the hem of a tent cloth. The dead gendarmes' pewter sabers hung down their horses' flanks.

The gendarmerie sergeant came up to Vukota, saluted, and said, "Sir, this will have to be reported to the Division in White Plains. If you have any kin in the mountains, better tell them now."

Vukota shook the sergeant's hand and slowly walked home.

* * *

Mountain guns rumbled across the wooden bridge over the Tara. The infantry creaked in solid gray columns, bayonets on their rifles, their mustaches drooping wet.

Rovca villages were razed, young and old beaten, and some of the men shot.

Vukota sat in his room, silent.

Then he dressed himself in his dark suit, put on his dark hat, stuck the Gasser in his belt and went to the Town Hall.

"Please accept my resignation," he said to the Town Commandant. "You can have the medals too; and this!" From under his jacket, Vukota took out a large, slightly bent photograph, of rows of Montenegrins staring into the camera. "In Memory of the Great Popular Assembly of 1918," the calligraphed caption read. "To All the Delegates Who Voted for the Union of All Serbs, to the Greater Glory of God!"

"You shall have your pension," the Commandant said, after a while. "Do you think my hopes were lesser than yours?"

"To hell with the pension," said Vukota and walked out.

* * *

Then came the Uprising in 1941.

"Joy to you, Vukota son of Mirko," Risto Toskov said. "A finer Montenegrin than Markan seldom mounted a charger!"

Vukota smiled at his neighbor, and tweaked his rich, long, silver mustache.

Outside the Radovic cafe, the Highlanders thronged the market, shouting and singing, brandishing their weapons. A large, dark circle of townspeople and peasants danced the *oro*. Inside the ring, a man and a woman leapt high, their arms spread.

* * *

The young man's eyes shone, as did his face, the girl smiled.

The young man cried out like an eagle and the girl showed her teeth.

Bedraggled Italian bersaglieri were herded by, while the crowd jeered at them. The flies in the Radovic cafe buzzed, but no one could hear that.

* * *

"To hell with you," Risto Toskov said to a Communist soldier, "I am going home and nobody's ever stopped me on my way!"

"Comrade Commander," shouted the patrolman, "some people here won't show respect. Shall I shoot?!"

"You will shoot your mother!" screamed Risto Toskov.

"I know this man," Vukota said to the Commander. "He's an honest Serb. Let him go!"

"Yes Sir," said the Commander and saluted. "But order must be kept! Your son's orders, Sir!"

* * *

"To talk of order is insulting, after all that idiocy and commotion," said Risto Toskov to Vukota.

"They're young," said Vukota. "Give them time."

* * *

Two weeks later the Italians came back, bringing the Shqipetars along. Their army, and the war cries of Shqipetars, could be heard long before the trucks drove into Kolasin.

In the market, lined up under the old Montenegrin flag, the bemedaled veterans of Djakovica, Scutari, and Mojkovac watched the Blackshirts.

Ljubo Minic, the leader of the townsmen, said to the Italian Colonel, "The Communists are our only enemy."

"But, our blood has been shed!" said the Blackshirt. His gray eyes went over the mustered veterans. "Not even Queen Helen can condone rebellion!"

Looking him in the eye, Minic said, "Colonel, the guilty

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shall be punished. Long live the House of Savoy!" and he snapped the Roman salute.

In the meanwhile, Vukota and other refugees climbed the trail to Trmanje.

* * *

Not long after, Communists came to Rovca: Markan Vlahovic and Vujica Sobajic, both commissars.

"Dad," Markan said, "we need help in organizing Rovca."

Vukota looked at his eldest son, hard, noting the criss-crossed leather belts and the pistol in his holster. "Don't you think," he said, "you should wait until the war is over, before deciding who's to rule?"

"Uncle Vukota," said Sobajic, trying to smile, "we need all the help we can get."

"Then, don't drive away those who would aid you!" shouted Vukota.

* * *

"Your father may be a coward and cur, Sobajic, not us!" spoke a man in a forester's uniform, white-faced. "Go and spread your gospel in Whitepaul, where your brains were addled!"

Because the assembled Rovcani laughed, the commissars were spared.

"Rovca are not the Vasojevici, Whitepaul, or the Plains of Kolasin!" shouted the forester. "Not even the Turks came here! We don't want Dagos defiling our huts and pastures, for your love of Stalin!"

* * *

Two hundred Communist Grahovljani and Niksici came down upon Trmanje over the top of the Foggy Mountain. Rovcani were caught as they slept, and herded out of the stone huts, their women wailing.

"You, stand aside," said the commander of the Niksici to Vukota. "The rest of you sonsofbitches," he cried, "shall suffer for treason!"

"We have turned upon no one, and we've done you no harm!" cried a peasant.

"But we'll do harm unto you," shouted the commander.

Their hands tied behind their backs, with the telephone wire the Niksici had brought, the Rovcani walked as if not awake.

"By God," shouted one of the condemned men, "Rovcani were never slaughtered thus! Brothers, let us cool ourselves in the Moraca!" He and four others ran surefooted up the craggy rim, and plunged headlong into the Canyon. They smashed against the walls before they tumbled, like great, dark sacks, into the river below.

The women cried even louder as all the tied men were shot, the Niksici watching from the above.

* * *

In Upper Moraca, Sava the Mace said to the Communists, "You're a senseless brood of whelps. In your furor and foolishness you will destroy this land!"

When his executioners came, the Mace met them with a rifle and killed eleven. The rest shot him and burned his house down. Slipping down the narrow, icy path which led to his house on a crag, his relatives carried the blackened corpse to Lindenvale. There, Mace was buried as he was, in his Montenegrin regalia.

Then, on Christmas Eve of 1942, a butcher's apprentice led a detail, and over a hundred bound "people's enemies," into Tara's Grove.

Laughing and singing, celebrating the bloodless liberation of Kolasin, his comrades in the high school above heard and saw nothing.

* * *

When the Chetniks took Kolasin, two weeks later, the bodies of the victims were dug out of their shallow, snow-covered graves and photographed. The men's skulls had been smashed in, their chests ripped open, the girls' and women's flesh cut away. After the grisliest corpses were shown to the people in the market, a Chetnik went into the Grove and knocked down the sign on a poplar. "Curs' Graveyard" it had read, before it was chopped into pieces, and burnt.

* * *

In the spring, Stevo Minic from Riverside sent word to Vukota to come for a parley.

"Dad, don't go, it's a trap," said Danilo Vlahovic.

Vukota smiled at his son. "I have never done anything to be ashamed of," he said, and swung his rifle over his shoulder.

"Damn each day a Minic was born," said Danilo, and went with his father. They walked down the snowy trail in silence. The woods glistened with icicles and wet bark showed dark.

* * *

At Riverside, green among the white mountains, the Minici disarmed the two Vlahovici.

"Why did you come to sully my honor?" said Stevo Minic."You had a choice, if I did not."

Vukota looked at him. "I pity you for your relatives," he said, and smiled.

"Whatever mine may be," said Minic, "yours have no name. Take them away!"

* * *

The snow at Kings Ridge was wet, deep, and treacherous, so the Minici untied their captives' hands, and poked them upwards with their rifles.

* * *

"You, your family, and your likes, have brought misfortune upon all of us," said Ljubo Minic to Vukota in the courtroom. "I pronounce you guilty of sedition, and treason, and sentence you both to death by the firing squad!"

"Damn you!" cried Danilo and held up his manacled hands. Two guards caught him underarm and pulled him out of the crowded courtroom.

"You," said Vukota to Minic, "shall be judged for conniving with the Dagos; though you should be shot just for what you are!"

"To hell with you, Vlahovic," said a man from the audience. "Curs' Graveyard's a tall order for anyone to match!"

Vukota looked at him, his eyes still, his mustache unsmiling.

* * *

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In the ramshackle Kolasin prison, Vukota received his cousin Panto Vlahovic.

"You've got to escape," whispered Panto to Vukota, while the Chetnik guard slouched by the door. "Friday night the guards will not be watchful—nobody but that dog Ljubo Minic wants to see an elder shot. Take this," said Panto loudly and handed Vukota a bundle.

"The visit's over," said the guard.

"Say hello to Catherine," said Vukota to his cousin. "I fear I've done her wrong." With cuffed hands he stroked his long white mustache and smiled.

* * *

In his cell, Vukota opened the food parcel and laid out the bread, the cheese, and the mutton upon the white cloth they were wrapped in.

"Let us feast," he said to the other inmates.

"Friday's the night to make a break for it," he said to his son. "We shall stuff some paper into the lock and push the door open after the evening count. There's supposed to be no one in the corridor.

"You shall climb through the attic hatch, knock out the wooden shingles, and slide down the roof into the snow. It's five hours over the mountain to Mojkovac, where Markan and our men are."

"Do you mean you are not coming along?" said Danilo.

"Vukota Vlahovic was never afraid of Chetniks," said his father, and put his hand on Danilo's shoulder. "But, you must go—I have no grandsons."

Gently, Vukota smiled under his mustache and stroked it. His son stared at the white cloth, saying nothing.

* * *

"Crawl in shame for what your people have done," the Chetnik sergeant said.

Vukota looked at him with clear, brown eyes, and slowly made the round of both the markets on his hands and knees.

When he was back at the jail, a sheep's bell was tied around his neck.

"For the old ram of a young flock," cried a guard.

A tall, dark onlooker suddenly stiffened and shouted, "F--- any man to tie a bell around a tribesman's neck!" He pushed a charge into the chamber of his Mauser and stood bristling in the middle of the street. Others fell away from him, silent.

Slowly, one of the guards untied the bell and held it, limply.

"If you want to shoot a Vlahovic," cried the Rovcanin, "shoot him like a man, no matter what anyone did!"

* * *

The guards marched Vukota Vlahovic across the swirling Pig River, past the Army barracks and to the Field of Birch.

There he was shot and two men were posted by his grave.

* * *

During the night, Panto and Milutin Vlahovic disarmed the guards, and carried the body to their village, where it was buried until 1945.

* * *

In the summer of 1946, Markan stood with his mother among the graves of his three brothers and father. The sun shone upon the white tombstones and the young poplars of the cemetery. The trees rustled in the breeze, swaying gently; birds sang and bumblebees glistened in the sunlight.

Trim in his UDBA colonel's uniform, dark, clean shaven, Markan looked around the Birch. He moved his shiny black boot, slightly, and watched the crushed grass.

Soundlessly, Catherine cried, as she did when she thought no one was looking.

* * *

"I'd cut you to pieces," said Markan to the Chetnik who had tied the bell around his father's neck. "But, I don't want my son to spit on me."

The Chetnik looked past Markan, through the open window, towards the blue hills of Lindenvale. He raised his tied, puffed-up hands, and wiped his mustache with the back of his hand.

His mustache gleamed and bristled, like the fur of a black wolf.

* * *

Still the Chetnik was shot, for someone else signed his execution.

* * *

Long after the war, Veso Vlahovic would wake up shouting in the night, his face and hands clammy. The family thought he had TB, but the checks revealed nothing.

Then Veso started drinking, and was pensioned off as a veteran.

Thirty years later, in 1983, he said to Vojin Vlahovic, "In '45, we captured some Boskovici, and one of them was just fifteen years old. He cried, and begged us to spare him but Mico opened him up with a Schmeisser. 'Take this for Vukota Vlahovic,' Mico shouted.

"But the remaining Boskovic said, 'The boy was away when Vukota was shot.'

"'What do I care,' Mico shouted, and shot the Boskovic with a single bullet in the gut. 'You never wept over us!'

"What am I to do?" said Veso to his nephew.

But Vukota Vlahovic's grandson could tell him nothing. Montenegrin by choice, unproven by ordeal, he listened and pondered. He poured his uncle some brandy and they got slowly drunk. In the gloom of Veso's hut they sat and stared into the fire, and Veso's eyes were bright as when he was a child, and the war had just begun.

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Paz *by Fred Chappell*

"Amazed at the moment's peak,
flesh became word—and the word fell."
—Octavio Paz, *A Draft of Shadows*

The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987, **edited by Eliot Weinberger, New York: New Directions.**

Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature **by Octavio Paz, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.**

Upon a confirmed gringo like me, contemporary Spanish language poetry makes much the same impression as contemporary Spanish or Latin American concert music. Broad prairies of cadenza enclose a garden patch of melodic theme, an orotund thunder of flourish results in a brief shower of substance. The treacherous mellifluousness of Spanish cloaks even the most shocking and brutal of utterance with a lyric sangfroid. For some intangible reason, it becomes hard to take Spanish language literature as seriously as other modern literatures. There is no solid reason that the works of Heinrich Böll and William Golding should be better known than those of Pio Baroja—but they are.

This supranational critical neglect has endured for a long time now, but there is a possibility that in our time three writers may have restored some measures of justice to the appreciation of Latin American literature. These writers are Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Octavio Paz.

This trio of names will irritate Paz. He does not count Brazilian writers or the Portuguese language as belonging to the Latin American tradition. He is fed up to the teeth—like most of his colleagues—with the name of Borges, but perhaps he does not recognize that for many of us much of the importance of Borges lies in the fact that he was denied the Nobel Prize because of his conservative political views. That injustice still rankles even in my own bleeding-heart liberal breast. And I think that Paz would not like to find himself designated as standard bearer for Latin American literature if there were any hint of programmatic insularity or provincialism connected with that honor.

Octavio Paz is quite consciously a global poet, one whose reputation is unhobbled by national boundaries. We have had precious few poets with such magnitude of repute since the time of Pound, Eliot, and Auden. Stephen Spender is still with us, and in the United States we have Robert Penn Warren; Russia boasts of Yevtushenko, but his work is not much respected by other poets. And these are about all the world class bards we have on hand, aren't they?

Perhaps not—but in whatever list we

Fred Chappell's most recent book is Source *(Louisiana State University Press).*

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set down, Octavio Paz will be included, and he will stand out among the other names as one who deliberately fashioned himself into this kind of poet, a man who realized there was a choice to be made, a position to fill.

There was first of all the matter of apprenticeship. We cannot say that Paz is the disciple of any single poet in the way that we can describe Robert Hillyer and William Meredith as disciples of Robert Frost. Paz took the whole modernist hagiology as his example and has tried to make personal acquaintance with as many of these figures as possible. In dedications to poems and in incidental remarks in critical essays, we find the names of Pierre Reverdy, Luis Cernuda, Andre Breton, John Cage, Roger Caillois, Robert Motherwell, Vasko Popa, Albert Camus, and many, many others—even Robert Frost, who seems almost bumptiously out of place in this aggregate of intellectual fashion plates. Paz studied the works of these artists, found opportunity to meet them, questioned them, and took from them all that he profitably could.

In a North American poet this procedure might well appear sycophantic, but to Paz it was necessary. He found Mexico a culturally backward country, he regarded himself in his earliest years as something of an outsider, and he saw the modernist tradition as a set of doctrines for which he could serve as evangelist. He need not—indeed, he did not—espouse all the ideas he imported and explained, but he was attracted to a great many of them and has enjoyed cheerful flirtation with scores of concepts which contradict one another. Paz is a Don Juan of the intellect. His thought is articulate, passionate, and extremely eclectic, but it is not profound; he takes such sensual enjoyment of so many ideas that he cannot bear to form a lasting relationship with any of them.

Romanticism, socialism, Freudianism, surrealism, Buddhism, Hinduism, cubism, Jungian archetypes, regionalism, dada, expressionism, haiku, renga, ballad, folk song, pun, rhyme, free verse, Donne, Gongora, Whitman, Sade, Quevedo, even Samuel Johnson (whom he wildly misunderstands)—all these impulses, tendencies, isms, itches, notions, whims, motives, concepts, tics, and frotheries have received at least passing attention from Paz. He has proclaimed and explained and declaimed and disowned and denied and decried all of these and many more besides. If 16th-century euphuism showed its flowery countenance upon the earth once again, Paz would have a weekend fling with it.

Such ideological philandering marks Paz as lacking the highest philosophical seriousness, but at the same time it helps to make him a powerful and valuable artist. He is a better surrealist poet for not submitting to doctrinaire surrealist policy as pronounced by Andre Breton or Max Ernst or anyone else. When he is a nationalist poet, he is more deeply regional for placing his work directly in the tradition of the European avant-garde. When he is a concrete poet, making poems in which the most apparent interest is visual design, he gives these productions point by rooting them in the peculiarities of the Spanish language. While it is true that he has deliberately searched out the most fashionable of intellectual fads of our time, he has been able to turn all of them to personal expression and to nobler purpose than they ordinarily enjoy. *Materiem superabat opus*, yes; but in Paz what the artistry transcends is not the materials but the mannerisms that usually accompany a certain style.

In a poet so many-minded it is impossible to find lines that might be designated as "typical," but perhaps this stanza from "One Day Among Many" can give a characteristic impression of Paz's surrealism:

> The cars are nostalgic for grass
> Towers walk
> time has stopped
> A pair of eyes won't leave me
> alone
> they are an agate beach in the
> calcined south
> they are the sea between rocks
> the color of rage
> they are the fury of June and
> its shawl of bees.

There is nothing finally distinctive about these phrases, which could as easily have been written by Breton or Paul Eluard or Rene Char; this is the common idiom of surrealists, interchangeable among poets as well as among poems.

But Paz has seen through this style so thoroughly that he has produced, in "This and This and This," a telling parody. The poem begins, as surrealist poems so often do, with a portentously self-gratulatory overstatement, "Surrealism has been the apple of fire on the tree of syntax." A long litany of absurd and bombastic claims follows—"Surrealism has been the cardboard crown on the headless critic and the viper that slips between the legs of the critic's wife"—and climaxes in a hysterical overview of modern history: "Surrealism has been the seven-league boots of those who escaped from the prisons of dialectical reason and Tom Thumb's hatchet that severs the knots of the poisonous vines that cover the walls of the petrified revolutions of the Twentieth Century." When surrealist poetry begins to sound like a Woody Allen character trying to write a surrealist poem, we know the jig is up.

Not that the possibilities of surrealist style are exhausted for Paz, not at all. His work is always going to be marked in some degree by fantastic hyperbole. But surrealism is to be counted as merely one more style, one more useful weapon in the poet's varied arsenal; for Paz it is neither a religion nor a politics, as it was for those figures of the 1930's who now look so quaint. I am thinking of the early Luis Bunuel, the early Marcel Duchamp, the early Louis Aragon; I am thinking of "Un Chien Andalou."

But Paz can remember the revolutionaries of that period, political and artistic, in darker terms. He speaks of them in a poem of the 1970's, "San Ildefonso nocturne":

> Good, we wanted good:
> to set the world right.
> We didn't lack integrity:
> we lacked humility.
> What we wanted was not
> innocently wanted.
> Precepts and concepts,
> the arrogance of
> theologians,
> to beat with a cross,
> to institute with
> blood. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Some
> became secretaries to the
> secretary
> to the General Secretary of the
> Inferno.
> Rage

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became philosophy,
its drivel has covered the
planet.

The warmest attraction of these lines is the evident fact that they are written more in sorrow than in anger. The belated recognition of common human frailty in the youthful utopists is a fresh theme and genuinely pathetic. In order to write these lines, the poet has had first to experience, and then to overcome, his weary disillusionment. He may abhor the outcome of reckless idealism (in this line from "Although It Is Night" he refers to Stalin's purges: "Utopia comes to earth in the Camps"), but he does not despise the idealists.

In fact, in his remarks about the weakling state of contemporary poetry in the world, he is both shrewd and sympathetic. In "The Verbal Contract," a public address published in *Convergences*, he says, "I imagine that the timidity of today's poets is due, among other things, to sheer fatigue: for more than half a century we have devoted all our energies to frenetic formal experimentation in the arts. It is a commonplace that these successive movements have degenerated into sterile manipulation: the avant-garde today repeats itself endlessly and has become a form of academicism."

One of the peculiarities of Paz's proposed regimen—as it is of his career—is that an artist is to begin as a member of the avant-garde and then to graduate from that brilliant but shallow cosmopolitanism into work that is more individual, more personal, more local. I am reminded of the story about Duke Ellington and the experimental jazz bass player Charles Mingus, when they were preparing to produce a recording together. "Hey, man," Mingus said, "let's do some avant-garde music." "Aw no," Ellington replied, "let's do something *modern*." All those literary and artistic isms that Paz has been involved with appear to have been procedures he made himself learn in order to be able to forget. He begins to look through the predictable future into the unpredictable past.

"We are returning to diversity," he declares. "This is one of the few positive signs in this terrible end of a century. Uniformity is death, and the most perfect form of uniformity is universal death; hence the collective extermination practiced in the twentieth century. Life is always particular and local: it is *my* life, this life of mine here and now. The resurrection of national and regional cultures is a sign of life."

Reflecting upon these words, we are not surprised to recall that one of Paz's almost constant heroes is Charles Fourier. The specifics of Fourier's utopia he rejects as unworkable and in the end as undesirable. But the ambition to humanize technology, to make it responsive to individual needs and desires, remains supremely valuable in his eyes. It becomes clear that for Paz avant-garde artistic movements are like technologies which the artist must master and subdue and bend to his own purposes. His cheerily restless experimentation has amounted to a lifetime of apprenticeship needed to fashion a skill, or even a genius, which could define and express the soul and body of his native Mexico, the collective spirit of Latin America.

The work that embodies these great aims will never be written. Paz fits into that modern romantic tradition in which the poet's great work remains unfinished. Romanticism is a mode of discourse which gives us hope by breaking its promises, and many of its greatest figures trace incomplete careers. Coleridge, Keats, Rimbaud, Hölderlin, Lorca—the pantheon of maimed titans is a large one. Like his great precursors, Paz understands that the only way to get the highest expression out of art is to demand of it more than it has to give. To this end, he keeps on defining and redefining poetry in his work. There must be scores of separate, and differing, definitions of the poetic art in his essays and poems. This one, from "San Ildefonso nocturne," may serve to help define Octavio Paz for us and to illustrate the noble shapes his thought and feeling take:

Poetry,
suspension bridge between
history and truth,
is not a path toward this or
that:
it is to see
the stillness in motion,
change
in stillness.
History is the path:
it goes nowhere,
we all walk it,
truth is to walk it.
We neither go nor
come:
we are in the hands of time.
Truth:
to know ourselves,
from the beginning,
hung.
Brotherhood over the void.

Liberal Arts

New York Tax Dollars at Work

The New York State Council on the Arts has announced its list of 17 visual arts awards totaling $174,776. They include:

—$10,500 "to create new quilts exploring color relationships"
—An unspecified sum for "a series of objects based on commodities from Africa and Asia . . . emblematic of the colonial relationship"
—$10,500 for "Apartheid No"
—$10,500 for "Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers"
—$10,000 for "Ebony Men, Too"
—$10,500 for "The Homeless Vehicle, to further define [the artist's] interest in the plight of the homeless in New York City by the design and construction of prototype mobile shelter units"

We have our own proposal in to provide shelter units and warm, colorful quilts for gay and lesbian artists who will protest apartheid by eating anticolonialist breakfast cereals.

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Ages in Chaos *by Samuel Francis*

"In history the way of annihilation is invariably prepared by inward degeneration. . . . Only then can a shock from the outside put an end to the whole."

—Burkhardt

Treason in Tudor England: Politics and Paranoia **by Lacey Baldwin Smith, Princeton: Princeton University Press; $25.00.**

Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt **by Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22.95.**

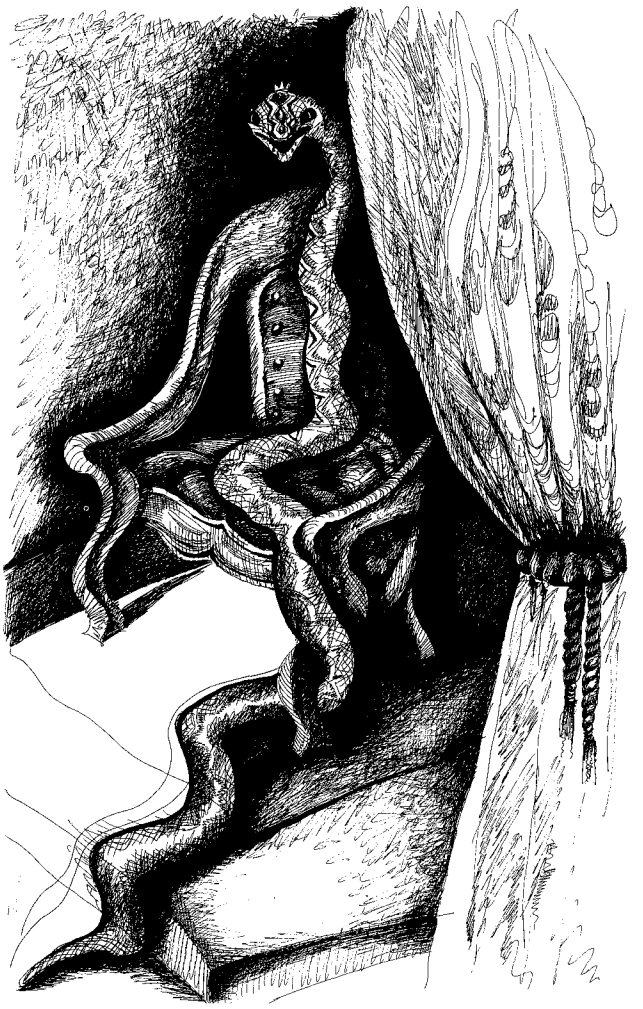
Discussion of treason has become almost impossible without quoting Sir John Harington's famous couplet, "Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason? / For if it prosper, none dare call it treason." Lacey Baldwin Smith quotes it as the epigraph of the first chapter of his learned and entertaining study of treason in 16th-century England, and various snatches of the lines have been used for several book titles in recent years. The popularity of Harington's poem may be due not only to the seeming ubiquity of betrayal in the 20th century but also to the revival of the world view that it reveals.

Harington's cynical insight contains a statement about human nature and, more deeply, about truth: men will not condemn the victors, even if their victory is won by treachery. Hermann Goering, among other celebrities of the 20th century, understood this precept; when asked by the official psychiatrist at the Nuremberg trials to write something appropriate on the copy of his indictment for war crimes, the former Reichsmarshall scribbled, "The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused."

Harington's lines also suggest that the meaning of treason is itself relative—one man's traitor is another man's patriot—and the linguistic nominalism implicit in the couplet recalls Humpty Dumpty's counsel to Alice. Can words mean what you want them to mean? asked the small Victorian girl. But of course, said Dumpty, and they must mean what you want them to mean if your will is to prevail, which, after all, is the most important thing. Harington's simple doggerel thus contains the germ of a philosophy (or an antiphilosophy) not very pleasant, to be sure, but strikingly similar to ideas that have been current throughout much of our own century: the universe has neither purpose nor meaning; values are entirely subjective; and all that matters is who wins. Whether Harington himself subscribed to this creed or simply offered it as a sarcastic commentary on his age I do not know, but enough of his contemporaries and ours did and do adhere to it to account for the drastic deflation in the price of loyalty that characterizes both eras.

In his account of the problem of loyalty and disloyalty in 16th-century England, Mr. Smith is acutely aware of the similarities in the two ages, though he tends to be somewhat cavalier toward treason. While acknowledging that the century was "not clinically paranoid," he assures us that it did manifest many of the symptoms of "the paranoid cognitive response to life," whose central feature is "the conviction that things are never as they appear to be—a greater and generally more sinister reality exists behind the scenes—and the corollary that what is standing hidden in the wings, prompting, manipulating, but always avoiding exposure to the footlights, is the presence of evil." Mr. Smith presents a considerable body of evidence from literary sources to substantiate his view, but he seems somewhat to forget that in the days of Henry VIII, Queen Mary, and Elizabeth I, there was often good reason to believe that things were not what they seemed.

The political revolution that occurred on Bosworth Field in 1485 brought to power a dynasty (Tudors) that for over a century had problems reproducing heirs, eliminating rivals, and securing the allegiance of its subjects, mighty and miniscule. This uncertainty was compounded by the religious revolution of the Reformation and the persistent struggles among Catholic, high Protestant, and Puritan factions. There was also an economic upheaval called the "Price Revolution," in which the prices of goods doubled between 1550 and 1600 (caused by a growing population and aggravated by the inflation that followed of gold and silver from new South American and Central European mines). Finally, there was the intellectual revolution, headed by, among others, Copernicus, Machiavelli, Luther and Calvin, and Bodin, which challenged the bases of political and social loyalties. It is therefore not surprising that men of the



Samuel Francis is deputy editor of the editorial page of the Washington Times.

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period kept their options open and their powder dry as they cast about for something and someone to adhere to. Mr. Smith correctly notes that "the proper study of treason . . . is the study of the entire sink and puddle of sixteenth-century politics." Also correctly, he dwells on the ineptitude of Tudor traitors, who often detailed their conspiracies in letters to each other and entertained grandiose visions of what they could accomplish with a purse of gold and a few bodkins, only to wind up on rack and scaffold after their harebrained schemes were discovered by Mr. Secretary Walsingham. For all the influence Machiavelli is supposed to have had on the politics of the century, the plotters should have read him more carefully. The longest chapter in the Florentine's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* deals with conspiracies, but the burden of his advice is that conspiracies hardly ever succeed and are at least as dangerous to those who hatch them as to the states against which they are directed.

But it was not mainly Machiavelli whom the plotters of the period read. Mr. Smith surveys the court literature of the Tudor era and finds in it the elements of societal paranoia. Treatises on how to advance one's career at court openly counseled spying, blackmail, mendacity, flattery, braggadocio, cultivating the right friends, and avoiding getting caught. Mr. Smith compares this literature to such contemporary classics as Robert Ringer's *Winning Through Intimidation*, an exemplar of a genre which chain booksellers now devote entire sections to. Inevitably followed a few years later by other volumes with titles such as *Why Do I Feel Lonely?* what Mr. Smith calls the "soulless," antisocial quality of such 20th-century reading for young managers on the make lacks the "free, demonic spirit" that characterized Mr. Ringer's predecessors at the court of the Tudors. "The ethics of loyalty today," writes Mr. Smith,

> have little meaning for the upwardly mobile success hunter, for loyalty can "be too easily simulated or feigned by those most desirous of winning." Where the twentieth and the sixteenth century part company, however, is in the concept of the enemy as the villain who seeks the destruction of his opponent for his own sake. In Robert Ringer's *Winning Through Intimidation* . . . "the game of business is played in a vicious jungle," but that jungle is filled with impersonal types, not with depraved and personal enemies.

The "sink and puddle" of 20th-century politics in relation to treason has been agonizingly appraised in a small library of books from Whittaker Chambers and Rebecca West to Allen Weinstein and Ronald Radosh. Once dismissed as right-wing fantasy or political opportunism, concern over the loyalties of Western elites to the institutions that enable them to hold wealth and power has by now been understood as a profoundly important historical factor in mid-century politics and diplomacy. Although Alger Hiss and Kim Philby have served as the archetypes of 20th-century traitors, the late Anthony Blunt was recently giving them a run for their money. Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, however, in their large *Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt* do little to advance this archetypal status; they are more concerned with compiling biographical facts about this distinguished art historian and pervert who was exposed as the notorious "Fourth Man" in the House of Commons in 1979, years after his complicity in treason with Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald Maclean was covered up by his friends in the British establishment. The authors' digest of Blunt's life is likely to remain the major biography and the most dispassionate account of the Blunt circle for some time.

Blunt's background as a marginal but respectable member of the British upper classes was not extraordinary, and his early years were apolitical. He was drawn into Communism while at Cambridge and was assiduously courted by a party cell led by Marxist economist Maurice Dobb and in which John Cornford, son of the classical scholar F.M. Cornford, was a dominant and active figure. Young Cornford's physical attractions (though heterosexual) probably had more than a little to do with the attention that Blunt and his close, weird friend Burgess bestowed upon him and with their eventual political subservience to him.

Given the upheavals of the early 20th century, it should not be remarkable that bright, frustrated, and often deviant young men became Communists, especially in an era when Soviet atrocities and failures were less well-known than they later became, and when the vacuity of traditional elites in America and England was becoming apparent. What is more remarkable, and far more dangerous, has been the inability of the elites themselves, traditional or new, to take the defections of their peers seriously. The insouciant attitude toward treason displayed by Alger Hiss's defenders from 1948 to the present indeed remains the paradigm of this phenomenon, but the cover-up of Blunt's role in espionage is no less noteworthy and is part of the same enduring pattern. Even after his exposure to British security authorities in 1964, Blunt was allowed to remain a Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, to retire as "Adviser" for the Queen's Pictures in 1972, and to retain a knighthood as well as his reputation, until his exposure by Mrs. Thatcher in the Commons on November 15, 1979.

If there is one difference between the 16th and 20th centuries' attitudes toward treason, it lies in the contemporary conviction that treason not only does not prosper but does not even exist. As German political theorist Carl Schmitt understood, a political society defines itself largely through the enemies it perceives. When an elite refuses to recognize enemies, it cannot take its own rule seriously or define the limits of permissible deviance within the society it pretends to rule. In the superstition of universal friendliness to which 20th-century elites generally subscribe and in the bureaucratic "games" of conflict in which they compete, there can be no perception of enemies, foreign or domestic, and therefore, no treason. Nor can there be an adequate definition of what fidelities comprise the state and society to which both elites and their subjects are supposed to remain loyal.

In a nation where untold millions of illegal aliens wander at will across the borders, where the proponents of capitalism boast of living in a "global economy" permeated by foreign own-

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ership and bending to every breeze of foreign exchanges, and where crucial foreign policy decisions are vetoed by allies in Europe, Japan, and the Middle East, how can anyone expect routine faithfulness to, much less willingness to risk life and fortune for, the fatherland? What is extraordinary is not that there are so many traitors and spies in contemporary America but that there are so few. Whatever the problems of their era, the failure to discern enemies is one weakness that Henry VIII and his children did not have, and in their determined efforts to eradicate their foes and to consolidate their own rule, they addressed the fundamental threats to their regime far more forthrightly than the would-be rulers of our own age of treachery have dealt with theirs.

U.S.—Staying in Business *by William R. Hawkins*

"He that fails in his endeavors after wealth and power will not long retain either honesty or courage."

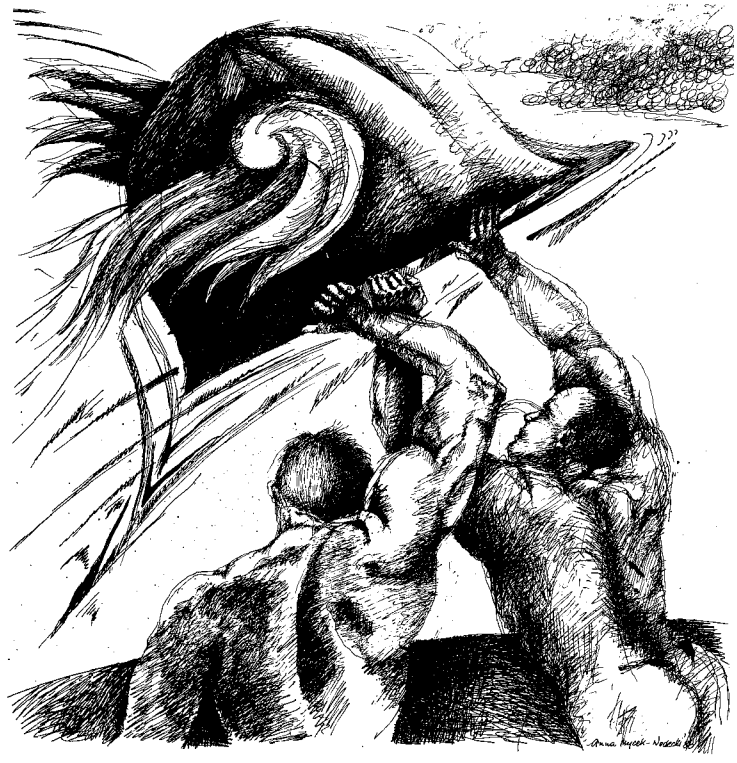
—Samuel Johnson

Manufacturing Matters: The Myth of the Post-Industrial Economy **by Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman, New York: Basic Books; $19.95.**

Not all change is progress. This simple statement is one of the dividing lines between right and left. An element of common sense to the conservative, it is denounced as timidity or a lame defense of vested interests by liberals and radicals. F.A. Hayek in his essay "Why I Am Not a Conservative" stated that "the liberal position is based on courage and confidence, on a preparedness to let change run its course even if we cannot predict where it will lead." Hayek is a moderate liberal whose optimism about change is made bearable only by an apparent assumption that people adhere to basically conservative modes of behavior. More radical thinkers—Rousseau, Godwin, Marx, Marcuse—have urged change with different expectations about where it would lead. Certainly the changes over the last 30 years provide plenty of examples of decay and disaster. History only reinforces the conservative position that a commitment to "change" without thought of consequences is irrational.

In the social, political, or military spheres, those on the right easily agree that many recent changes have been for the worse. The aim of conservative public policy is to control events in the best interest of the United States, i.e., to foster changes that are beneficial while working to retard or reverse changes that are harmful. Only in the economic sphere do conservatives abandon common sense in favor of an unfounded liberal optimism: economics, alone among the activities of mankind, has an "invisible hand" that guarantees progress. Indeed, to listen to some exponents it would be easy to think that market outcomes were the result of divine intervention rather than the strategies of businessmen and governments pursuing gain.

Yet, as anyone in business knows, competition produces both winners and losers. The failure of individual firms can be devastating to those directly involved, as well as entire communities. But within a closed society this may only be a ripple, with the expansion of the victors making up for the collapse of the losers. However, on a global scale, things are different. Nations, not just firms, compete for wealth and power. The stakes are much higher. Summing costs and benefits across national boundaries is not valid. There are still fundamental differences between the loss of market share by GM to Ford or the shift of jobs from Ohio to Georgia, and the loss of market share to Nissan or a shift of jobs to Brazil. There is no consolation in being told that the de-



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cline in your own country has made the "world" a better place. There is no such entity as the "world"—only other nation-states that have gained at your expense.

Manufacturing Matters is an attempt by two Berkeley University of California economists to shake America out of the complacency of the "invisible hand" approach to international trade. Manufacturing is the central front in the global trade war and technology is:

> revolutionizing production . . . creating a fundamental economic transition that puts the position of every nation in the international hierarchy of wealth and power, including the United States, up for grabs.

By value-added, manufacturing directly generates 24 percent of GNP. Cohen and Zysman, citing the 1983 *Report of the President on the Trade Agreements Program*, then add 25 percent of GNP for services "tightly linked" to manufacturing. Thus, manufacturing represents about half (49 percent) of GNP. It is this linkage that forms the core of the authors' argument. "Industrial chains" link a number of manufacturing and service sectors. Telecommunications is one example among the many cited.

> Will American companies dominate international trade in communications if they are not leaders in computers, semiconductors, telephone switching equipment, launchers, satellites and fiber optics?

No, and our rivals understand this. Foreign industrial policies target key links in the chain, hoping to capture a few strategic pieces so the rest of the industrial chain can be pulled under their control.

It is often argued that the shift from an industrial economy to a service economy is a natural evolution and thereby a sign of progress. Cohen and Zysman note that while all advanced nations are making this shift, it is important to distinguish between types of services. Engineering, software design, social work, and fast-food are all services, but they are not of equal value to an economy, nor do they produce the same income to those employed in them. "Lose manufacturing and you will lose—not develop—high-wage service jobs."

High-wage service jobs are tied to manufacturing by high technology. "Most high-tech products are producer goods, not consumer goods." Lasers, robots, computers, bioengineering, and machine tools are all linked to improved methods of production. "America must control the production of those high-tech products it invents" for two reasons. First, "production is where the lion's share of value-added is realized. It is where the 'rent on innovation' is captured." The profits come from using the technology, not in developing it. Without an industrial base, R&D becomes too expensive to sustain. Also,

> unless R&D is tightly tied to the manufacturing of the product—and to the permanent process of innovation in production now required for competitiveness in manufacturing—R&D will fall behind the cutting edge of incremental innovation.

In short, "you cannot control what you cannot produce." Manufacturing, the best service jobs, and technological progress are an integral whole. The aim of policy should be "*not a transition from an industrial economy to a service economy, but from one kind of industrial economy to another.*" If postindustrial means nonindustrial, then a postindustrial America will be an "impoverished" America.

Cohen and Zysman neatly demolish the notion of separate economic stages. Those who argue that the transition from industry to services is like that of the earlier shift from agriculture to industry make a fundamental error if they conclude that industry can be abandoned. America did not abandon agriculture when it became an industrial power. Instead, agricultural production continued to expand at a rapid pace. The sectors reinforced each other, as mechanization increased farm productivity. The strength of the American economy has been its ability to build on success without giving up strategic sectors that would make it vulnerable in the future.

More than just money and jobs are at stake. Military power depends on industrial capacity and technological innovation. "An erosion of our competitive position in a critical set of industrial chains would constitute a massive reduction in our strategic independence and diplomatic options."

> Diverse, robust and leading-edge U.S. producers in [semiconductors, computers, telecommunications, robotics, machine tools] and other industrial chains are more critical to U.S. national security at the current time than to most other nations . . . whatever the ups and downs of military spending, our basic security posture is built on the assumption that America will maintain, round after hurried round, a permanent lead in a rather broad range of advanced industrial technologies.

The economies of scale in manufacturing and the high cost of R&D make a large commercial industrial sector a necessity. It lowers the cost of producing military equipment because much of the fixed cost of production and research are underwritten by the commercial side of the enterprise. Private American firms must be able to maintain, under normal peacetime conditions, the productive capacity and R&D programs needed in an emergency. Otherwise, the government will have to structure its own reserve capacity at enormous public expense, or the nation will become dependent on uncertain foreign supplies. Both are high-risk, high-cost alternatives to the protection of a large and ongoing commercial industrial base.

American productivity has lagged behind Japan's, West Germany's, and other rivals'. Cohen and Zysman urge greater investment in R&D and reindustrialization. Industry must "automate not immigrate." This will require greater capital formation because advanced industrial systems are capital-intensive. The authors make the usual plea for a tax system that encourages savings and discourages consumer debt. The raiding of the capital pool to fund government deficit spending must also end. Instead, the government must contribute more to R&D and be prepared to subsidize private industry in key areas.

This represents a turnabout from

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current policies which have raised the cost of capital to business, increased taxes on industry, and promoted labor-intensive growth with stagnant productivity. It is ironic that American competitiveness has declined under a supposedly pro-business administration. Yet, the "supply-side" failure to live up to its billing stemmed from too narrow a focus on individual tax rates, a factor with weak and indirect links to savings and business investment.

The unprecedented string of large trade deficits that has plagued the U.S. economy since 1982 must end. These deficits have slowed economic growth and converted the U.S. into the world's largest debtor. Neither cheap labor nor cheap dollars will end the deficits. Trade policy must be part of industrial policy as it is among our rivals, who "accept that industrial promotion and the direct support of private interests is a legitimate function of government." While the U.S. talks of "free" or "fair" trade rules, leaving the market to determine results, foreign governments "are increasingly negotiating directly about trade outcomes," seeking control of production and markets. The U.S. must realize what is at stake and develop strategies to protect its national economic interests.

The U.S. must become what Cohen and Zysman call a "developmental state" aiming at "the upgrading of the nation's position in the international economic hierarchy." Policies "to shape the national production structure and the pattern of comparative advantage to assist the evolution of wages and production" are well-known and have been used successfully for centuries. Japan did not invent mercantilism, only applied it, while we slept in a liberal dream world. Cohen and Zysman do not go into the details of specific policies. Each strategic sector will require its own policy mix. Their purpose is not to urge a particular strategy but to prod economic policymakers into starting to think in strategic terms. It's a message that deserves wide attention.

The authors do not deal much with the issue of "protectionism." But they do repeatedly cite the advantages Japanese and European industries have gained by having secure domestic markets that serve as a base for achieving economies of scale and reducing the risk of new investment. And it is hard to imagine a way to end the trade deficits without curtailing imports.

Historically, such a policy approach has been favored by conservative/nationalist regimes, including American administrations until quite recently. No nation can remain a Great Power if its economic core is controlled by foreigners or if its powers of production lag behind its rivals'. The loss of America's economic independence and industrial supremacy is a change for the worse.

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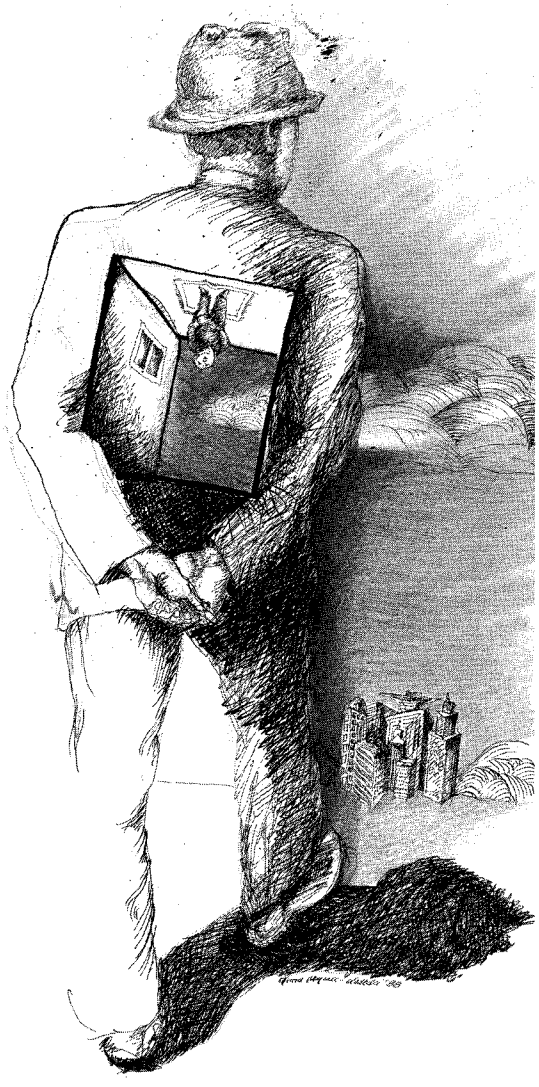
Jerry-Built America *by Fred Butzen*

"By their fruits, so shall ye know them."
—Jesus of Nazareth

Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography **by Franz Schulze, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.**

The year 1986 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig Mies, the man who, under the name of Mies van der Rohe, did the most to shape modern American architecture. Of the numerous books that marked this occasion, perhaps the most important is the biography by Franz Schulze, a scholar and critic of contemporary architecture. Thorough, honest, gracefully written, richly illustrated, and well designed, it invites a reevaluation of Mies's work as the most catastrophic failure of art in the 20th century.



Fred Butzen is a technical writer for a publisher of computer languages and operating systems.

suited Mies well, for he was drawn to where the spirit of the times was manifesting itself most powerfully—i.e., to where "the action" was. In the 1920's, the action was certainly among the radicals.

From 1918 to 1927, Mies worked mainly on theoretical projects which attracted attention at exhibitions. In 1926, he built the first of his works in the modern, geometric style: a monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Photographs indicate that the monument was visually compelling, if one ignores the huge steel hammer and sickle at its side. Mies does not appear to have been a Communist or committed to any cause other than himself and his work; rather, he would work for nearly anyone who gave him artistic latitude. It is noteworthy that his first modernist design to be built is more a sculpture than a building.

In 1927, Mies was named artistic director of the *Weissenhofseidlung*, a model housing project near Stuttgart. Mies solicited work from many radical young architects; their designs meshed so well that they seemed to embody an "international style"—by which name this school is best known. In 1929, Mies built his most highly praised work, the German Pavilion for the Barcelona World's Fair. The "Barcelona Pavilion" stood only for six months and was used only once, but it is still named one of the greatest of all modern buildings.

In 1929 Mies was named the head of the Bauhaus, which he oversaw for the last four years of its life. Under his leadership, the Bauhaus turned away from hurdy-gurdy experimentation to teaching Mies's ideas on architecture and design. He also took a firm stand against student radicalism, at one point expelling the entire student body. In 1933, he closed the Bauhaus rather than submit to the control of the National Socialists.

In 1938, Mies became the head of the department of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Before he came to Chicago, much of his work was "paper architecture"; of buildings he had only a handful, mostly private homes. Chicago offered Mies the chance to build large for the first time. His first major commission was to design the entire IIT campus; there, he built the first of the glass and steel "boxes" with which his name is associated. From this point to his death in 1969, Mies designed the buildings for which he is best known: 860-880 Lake Shore Drive, the Seagram Building, the Farnsworth House, the Toronto-Dominion Centre, and many others. Despite the number and the variety of his commissions, however, his work became marked by sameness. As Schulze notes, Mies evolved two basic designs that he used over and over: the "prismatic tower and the pavilion of unitary space." Mies's inclination to the *sachlich*, the unadorned and functional, moved him to an impersonal work that, oddly, was quite expressive

Ludwig Mies was born in Aachen. His father, Michael, was a stone carver. Mies himself described how once, when his brother suggested a shortcut in stone-carving, Michael said, "Do you know the finial at the top of the spire in Cologne? Well, you can't crawl up there and get a good look at it, but it is carved as if you could. It was made for God."

Mies attended the local cathedral school, then the *Gewebeschule*, where he learned the building trade. His schooling ended at age 15, when he found a job as a draftsman in a local stucco factory. When he was 19, Mies obtained a position as a draftsman in a Berlin architect's office.

In those days, it was possible to become an architect by working in an architect's office instead of going to school. Mies aspired to become more than a draftsman; within a year of moving to Berlin, he went to work for Bruno Paul, the leader of a group of radical young architects who insisted on simplicity and geometric form, or *Sachlichkeit* ("reality," "impartiality").

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Mies's first ventures into architecture were free-lance commissions to build homes. He soon secured a position with Peter Behrens, one of Germany's leading young architects and an advocate of *Sachlichkeit*. Behrens built public architecture — factories and pavilions — and in his office Mies heard the other young architects discuss how industrialization affected art and society.

In 1913, Mies married Ada Bruhn, the daughter of a wealthy inventor. A year or so older than Mies, Ada was a wealthy, self-consciously modern woman who had studied "eurhythmics" and was willing to tolerate and underwrite her husband.

After spending World War I as a clerk in the army, Mies returned to Berlin. It was a revolutionary time, with *sachlich* radicals competing with expressionist ones. Mies cofounded a journal called *G* (for *Gestaultung*) and spent much time in artistic politicking, allowing his thought on architecture to solidify. As he wrote in *G*: "Essentially our task is to free the practice of building from the control of aesthetic speculators and restore it to what it should exclusively be: Building." Architecture, to him, was an independent and self-contained art, while patrons who attempted to influence it in ways not dictated by building itself were "aesthetic speculators" whose influence should be minimized.

The early 1920's also saw the publication of Spengler's *Decline of the West*. It appears to have affected Mies deeply; his copy is heavily marked. From then to his death, Mies's writings would be punctuated by Spenglerian assertions: "Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space" or "Not yesterday, not tomorrow, only today can be given form." Spengler gave Mies the second pillar of his thought: that the only authentic architecture is that which embodies the spirit of its time. This principle also of his personality. Schulze speculates that Mies was led to his style by the desire to express the industrial character of our time and, second, by a desire to create buildings of pure architecture — an architecture that expresses the essence of building, in the manner and materials of the day. The personally expressive, the stylish, the influence of "aesthetic speculators" had to be stripped away to let the essential building of the 20th century shine through.

Schulze claims that Mies's interest in essences came from his reading of St. Thomas Aquinas, a philosopher whom Mies would quote on occasion. Thomas, Schulze claims, expressed a system in which "essences" overarch the material world, and Mies saw his work as a reaching for these essences. Mies believed that if he removed the particular from a building, it would come closer to incorporating the essence of *building*. Aquinas, however, asserts exactly the opposite: that only through the particular does essence reveal itself. In a building, essence is known not by how the building is conceived, nor even by how it appears, but by what it does: as Hopkins put it, *What I do is me*. And it is precisely in the *doing* that Mies's buildings fail.

Schulze, who is an honest critic, does not disguise the impractical nature of Mies's work. Only Mies could build a house in the Fox River Valley of Illinois (the Farnsworth House) and not include screens to keep out the mosquitoes and flies. Only Mies could build an art gallery (the National Gallery in Berlin) and not include walls upon which to hang the paintings. Who else but Mies could design a building of glass that denies natural light to the people who work there (the post office of the Federal Center, Chicago)?

Mies's buildings not only fail in practical terms, they also fail to fulfill a public purpose. As Philip Bess, a Chicago architect and critic, has noted, public architecture must give public expression to the logic of the institutions that commission it. If this is not done, both the building and institution are the weaker for it: The building is deprived of the personality that the institution would bestow on it, and the institution is deprived of a way to announce its mission — and be reminded of it. For example, a cathedral serves both as a pronouncement of the faith to nonbelievers and a reminder of the faith to believers. By contrast, Mies's chapel on the IIT campus must be labeled "Chapel" to be distinguished from any of his other buildings. In truth, the only essence Mies's buildings express is that of solipsism.

It is clear that in Thomistic terms, Mies's "essential" buildings should not be called buildings at all. Rather, Mies built a weird kind of walk-through sculpture that, almost by accident, happens to be marginally habitable. In eliminating the influence of "aesthetic speculators," Mies appears to have minimized the importance of the *users* of his buildings and discounted their needs or desires wherever they conflicted with his art. It is noteworthy that Mies's most successful building, the Barcelona Pavilion, had literally no function whatever — it was meant to be walked through and admired, and nothing else.

These problems would be tolerable if Mies were just one architect among many; however, he has been tremendously influential. His sculptures do reflect the influence of industry; they do appear quite "modern," smooth, machine-like, orderly, rational. Ours is also a time that values excessively the notions of idealism and historicism — in that sense, Mies is quite expressive of the spirit of the day. You cannot ignore Ludwig Mies when you must work in one of his sculptures or pay taxes to support one or see a classic building razed to make way for one. I know of no other artist who has so many *victims* — no other word is appropriate.

Inevitably, the reaction to Mies set in even before his death. The true catastrophe, however, is that debate in architectural circles, whether for Mies or against him, is still on his terms. By and large, architects still assume that "building alone matters" and that true architecture must embody the *Zeitgeist*. There is considerable discussion about just what the *Geist* of the *Zeit* is and how best to express it; there is even some uneasiness about the sterility of contemporary architecture; but few seem aware that the assumptions that underlie the discussion are wrong. This failure of thought has gone a long way toward destroying our cities.

Michael Mies, the architect's father, insisted on building for God. Michael Mies's God was much more literal — and more human — than Ludwig Mies's spirit. Only when we cease to follow Mies van der Rohe creating for "spirit" and "essence," and instead heed Michael Mies and create for God and for man, will we begin once again truly to build.

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The Discovery

by David Hallman

***The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* by Mark Lucas, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.**

The old saw tells us that all things come to those who wait. And what a joy it is to find Andrew Lytle, in his vigorous 80's, receiving his just due, however late. The Richard Weaver Award by The Ingersoll Foundation, a generous grant by the Lyndhurst Foundation for his contribution to his Southern culture, honorary degrees from colleges hither and yon, and the recent appreciation of the Southern Agrarian Movement, with all its literary and social implications, all testify to his stature as a man and a writer. A full literary biography is in the making, his books are being gradually republished, and now we have at last the first complete critical appreciation of Lytle's contribution to American writing.

Mark Lucas' *The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* is, I believe, only the second book devoted exclusively to Lytle as an artist in his own right rather than as a member of a now-celebrated group of writers. There have been bibliographies, scattered essays, and a fine collection of criticisms edited by M.E. Bradford, all of which attest to his standing in the world of letters. As novelist, critic, and editor, Lytle has enjoyed a career spanning over 60 years. If the appreciation is late in coming, if he has sometimes labored in the shadows of his friends and cohorts—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren—then the belated celebration is all the more welcome.

Lucas' title, however, *The Southern Vision*, is somewhat misleading. Lytle's family background is Tennessean; he was an intimate with the Vanderbilt Fugitives and one of the most aggressive of the Agrarians; his art almost always deals explicitly with the South of his experience, but Lytle is first and always an artist, and like Faulkner, Wolfe, and Warren, his work transcends his regional topicality. If his "vision" has a Southern accent, it also has a universal appeal. Few writers have been so sophisticated in their knowledge and application of the craft of writing. His devotion to that "craft"—one of Lytle's favorite words—is the subject of Lucas' study.

The Southern Vision does the obvious. Mixing criticism with useful biographical information, Lucas works chronologically through the Lytle *oeuvre* from his biography of Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forrest through selected essays developing his Agrarian and Southern sympathies, short stories, and his four novels which best show the breadth and depth of Lytle's art. *The Long Night* is as bloody a tale of vengeance as our literature can come up with. *At the Moon's End*, on the other hand, increasingly my personal favorite but long out of print, recounts the trek of Hernando de Soto through the 16th-century Southern wilderness. The invasion of the Spanish conquistadors—nominally in the name of Christendom and civilization, but actually in a quest for elusive gold—is a great allegory of corruption and hubris. And *A Name for Evil* has often been called a Southern version of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. It is probably Lytle's least satisfactory work, but Lucas discusses it interestingly in the context of Lytle's attempt to restore an old and isolated country home for his family during the 1940's. Lytle considers *The Velvet Horn* his masterpiece, and this underappreciated novel which Caroline Gordon called "a landmark in American fiction, unique in its greatness and originality" is treated with due respect here. (But the best, and really incomparable, study of this novel is Lytle's own account of its writing. "The Working Novelist and the Myth-making Process" is as fascinating and frightening an account of the creative process as has ever been offered by an author on his own work.)

If I might suggest a novel way to read Lucas' admirable study—and a different way to approach Lytle himself—the *last* chapter makes a good beginning. Under the heading of "Coda," Lucas discusses Lytle's late family memoir *A Wake for the Living*.

BOOKS IN BRIEF—LITERARY

***Dara* by Patrick Bresson, New York: Franklin Watts; $15.95. Translated from French by Nicole Irving.** Winner of the Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie Française for 1985, this story of post-World War II Europe cannot escape the flippant Gallicism of its author. Bresson, who published eight novels before he was 28, writes of what he could have learned only by hearsay, though he does it well, taking care not to garble too many South Slav names and events.

***Winter in Moscow* by Malcolm Muggeridge, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.** This reprint of the 1934 classic tale of Stalin's Moscow, seen through Western eyes, is a welcome reminder that many things change, but the gullibility, ignorance, superficiality, and venality of Western journalists do not.

***Divertimento 1889* by Guido Morselli, New York: E.P. Dutton; $15.95. Translated from Italian by Hugh Shankland.** Fifteen years after his suicide as an unknown novelist in 1973, Guido Morselli is the literary *cause célèbre* of Italy. His novel, unjustly compared to Nabokov (why must critics think in similes?), is an accomplishment by a gentleman who knew and loved his world.

***Between the Woods and the Water* by Patrick Leigh Fermor, New York: Viking; $18.95.** There are still travelers (as opposed to tourists), though not too many like Mr. Fermor. His wonderful journey through 1933 Europe—its past, present, and future, its peoples, and himself—is one of those rare, unclassifiable books destined, unfortunately, to languish in the "Travel" sections of public libraries.

***Partings* by Leonid Borodin, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; $15.95.** This novel by a former Soviet prisoner of conscience tells it as it is—a survival game in a large glasnost zoo, hardly different from what Muggeridge has seen, back in the 30's.

***New Writers of the South: A Fiction Anthology*, edited by Charles East, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press; $12.95.** A very good atlas of a very important literary region, with some gems, notably Madison Smartt Bell's *Monkey Park*, Louise Shivers' *Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail*, Donald Hays's *The Dixie Association*, and others.

***American Journals* by Albert Camus, New York: Paragon House; $15.95. Translated by Hugh Levick.** In a true, unliterary journal, Camus jotted his impressions of America in 1946.

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Lytle writes that the book was intended to "tell his daughters who they are and where they come from." A veritable gold mine of anecdotes and tall tales, Lytle's book is a marvelous introduction to the writer whom Robert Penn Warren has called the "best story teller in America." In his *The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* Lucas leads us to a writer who is finally receiving the wide appreciation he has always deserved.

David Hallman is professor of English at James Madison University.

Humanism as a Fine Art

by Carl C. Curtis

Paul Elmer More: Literary Criticism as the History of Ideas **by Stephen L. Tanner, Albany: State University of New York Press; $19.50.**

It is a common fact of our century—appreciated most by George Orwell—that men who lust after power will distort words to gain their own ends. In 1933, a significant distortion took place. A group of men, John Dewey among them, drafted and published a now famous document, the *Humanist Manifesto I*, in which they declared their allegiance to a world free of "any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." Steadily, this creed has come to define the humanist (or secular humanist) in our day, to the point that "humanism" has become a byword to conservatives, especially conservative Christians.

It was not always so. In the decades immediately preceding the 1933 manifesto, the term "humanist" had been associated with a few isolated scholars, for the most part acting independently of one another, who had developed rather traditional ideas about education, letters, and man's place in the universe. Their ideas, however diverse the application, were based on the premise that "supernatural or cosmic guarantees" had a great deal to do with "human values." One of the main figures to emerge from this circle of scholars was Paul Elmer More, whose thought is the subject of a new book by Stephen L. Tanner.

In one sense, More had something in common with the men who drafted the *Humanist Manifesto I*. Like all men who claim the title of humanist, he asserted the dignity of human life, the responsibility of the individual, and the importance of free will. Yet More has never ceased to be treated with contempt by the post-*Manifesto* humanists, because he saw clearly that humanism, in order to survive as a distinct philosophy, had to rest on something more than itself. "Will not the humanist," he said, "unless he adds to his creed the faith and the hope of religion, find himself at the last, despite his protests, dragged back into the camp of the naturalist?" This attitude applied even to More's allies, men such as Irving Babbitt. For More, it was necessary to harness humanism to a body of ideas and beliefs totally alien to the modern *ethos*. Specifically, these ideas and beliefs were Platonism and Christianity. Hence, the split with modern humanists.

To avoid falling into the error he criticized, More set himself the task of investigating, in Tanner's words, "the fundamental questions of what is the nature of man and how should he believe and act." These are old questions based on a view of man which fewer and fewer of the intellectuals of the day were able to accept. Asking them was a result of More's fascination with two forces at work in the history of modern ideas, humanism and naturalism.

Humanism, according to More, primarily meant accepting a dualistic view of man. Man is simultaneously a natural and supernatural being. To ignore either aspect of the soul leads to cultural and political dangers that have become familiar to us all: the loss of the special position of man in Creation and the lowering of man to a cog in a statist machine. Naturalism, in other words. More saw in the tendency toward naturalism (what we now mistakenly call humanism) the chief heresy in the West from the Renaissance to our day, manifesting itself in a variety of forms and creeds—rationalism, scientism, romanticism, humanitarianism—all carrying the basic message that man was, one way or another, in control of his own destiny and not responsible to either any transcendent Being or code.

The decline of true humanism and the rise of naturalism in the thinking of Western men became More's great theme. He made it his objective to analyze the conflict of these two creeds in the literature of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and, as Tanner puts it, "to cultivate within himself the historic sense and thus trace the history of the human spirit."

It is no surprise, then, that More chose to dedicate himself to the calling (indeed, he considered it a very high calling) of literary criticism. But it was literary criticism of a kind unknown to those of us who have been schooled in the New Criticism or in Deconstructionism. More's writing was moral, philosophical, and historical in its emphasis. Focusing on individual writers and periods, More attempted to isolate the central ideas behind each artist and place them within the context of an intellectual and historical movement. In his *Shelburne Essays*, he chose to measure the worth of his subjects primarily in terms of where they fell in the humanist-naturalist debate. The method has its limits, as Tanner is quick to point out. More tends to ignore the formal and stylistic side of some of the greatest writers. But the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. The disciple of the New Criticism who reads a poem as an isolated event may come away with a very good understanding of the work, but not much else. The humanist is much more likely to leave his reading with a sense of moral and spiritual enrichment. He may also be better prepared to do battle with a few Philistines.

Stephen Tanner has done an excellent job of discussing More's achievement. Like More's criticism, Tanner's study has its limits, as, indeed, the author is ready to confess. But it stands as a superb introduction to a man whom most conservatives hear of now and again (mostly in the writings of Russell Kirk) but never bother to read. We could spend a profitable week in slowly digesting this book. But the true dividend will be realized only if we then turn to the works of More himself.

Carl C. Curtis is a free-lance writer living in Tyler, Texas.

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Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Auguries of the End of Innocence

My first-grade son was recently bitten in the arm by an exuberant classmate. Luckily (said his principal) my son was wearing a heavy jacket, and the boy's teeth didn't puncture his skin: "Human bites are even more dangerous than dogs', you know," she reminded me. Yes, I'd read that, and agreed that we were lucky—and then promptly translated the incident into just one more proof that all first-graders come from Mars. I chuckled as I told the story to a colleague, and the first thing she said was, "Oh, wow, I bet you were worried about AIDS until you found out Robbie's skin hadn't been broken." Well, no, actually I hadn't thought about AIDS at all. Until then.

* * *

North Dakota has two—that's one, two, period—diagnosed cases of AIDS among schoolchildren. The identities of these children have been kept secret from even their teachers. Having with the rest of the nation seen the burned home of the AIDS children in Florida, and having imagined how the two North Dakota kids felt watching it and wondering when their neighbors would burn *their* house, I thought this secrecy was not a bad idea.

A friend of ours thought differently, as we talked at a party. "Teachers don't know who these kids are, right? So they're going to treat *every* kid as if he's got AIDS."

I nodded, seeing the logic in such behavior and not seeing any harm. "Well, what if one of *your* kids has a seizure and stops breathing—is his teacher going to give him mouth-to-mouth?" I'd never thought of that. "And what if your child gets badly cut—will the teacher stop the bleeding?" I remembered the near-bite. Suddenly the unlimited possibilities for worry became clearer.

My friend wasn't finished. His wife of more than 30 years is a nurse, although they certainly don't need the money. Among other things, she does hospice work, and *that's* what has him scared. "It's inevitable that she'll come across an AIDS patient sooner or later," he said, sipping his scotch, "and you know *her*—she won't turn it down."

Here I was sure that I *could* set his mind at ease. "You know what a good nurse she is. And she's smart. There are things people can do to be almost perfectly safe giving care to AIDS patients. She'll be fine," I said.

He just shook his head. "Yeah, she's a good nurse, all right. The best. Do you really think that if an AIDS patient needs immediate resuscitation my wife's going to take the time to hunt around for her little mouth protector? What if the patient vomits or sneezes and she gets it in her eye or mouth or in a sore? There *is* no protection. I've told her it bothers me, and she just tells me not to worry, that she'll be all right," he said, pride in her mixed with his unwillingness to go gently into widowhood or death.

* * *

Nothing happened, really. I was waited on by a man who'd waited on me a hundred times. The only difference was that I knew something about him I hadn't known before. He had confessed to the whole staff, including a friend of mine—"announced" is how she put it—that he had tested positive for AIDS. It wasn't surprising, I guess, seeing that his homosexuality was well-known and long-standing, but he was my first acquaintance to be touched by the disease. After his announcement, the manager decided *not* to give him a different, less public position. And here I was, doing business with him, having tried my best to avoid it. He handed me my card, and I took it as politely as I could: What do you say to someone you barely know who will probably die soon and has brought it entirely on himself? There are no such words in my vocabulary. When he had left me to help someone else, I searched his face for signs of imminent death. They weren't there, but suddenly *I* felt a general malaise that took me an hour to discard. Was he still sleeping around, I wondered? Was he sorry he had? Should I wash my hands before I picked up my kids from school? Wash them with what? I couldn't name the source of my rage.

* * *

All this takes on absolute importance because I have children. The children are physical realities from which there is no easy escape and on which the whole world hangs. Another, perhaps more abstract consideration is that my husband and I are Christians and are trying to raise our children as Christians. And it's hard for me on this matter: I'm angry and full of resentment, because we—especially the *children*, damn it!—are in this respect the *truly* innocent. The promiscuous queers and the drug addicts—from whom AIDS predominantly emanates—have no *right*, regardless of what the ACLU says, to invade the happy, productive, godly life we're trying to build. Is AIDS a punishment from God? It would be easy to think so—after all, most of its victims are simply suffering the logical effects of their own licentiousness—but it's killing innocents, too. The "gays" take evil glee in telling us, loudly, often, that the number of innocent deaths is going to skyrocket. Is that a threat?

My daughter will be dating in a few years. My seven-year-old son, who is disgusted when I kiss the cats on the lips (and cat germs are even cleaner than dog germs), has taken to kissing Francie and Roslyn and Becky at recess—he says they chase him and pin him down, that he can't help it, this boy who prides himself on being the Fastest Runner in the World. I'd

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give just about anything for the return of the innocent good old days when I would have had the luxury of talking to my children about self-respect and responsibility and mere *propriety*. Now I have *death* always at the back of my mind. Shall I let them be innocent a little longer? Will it kill them? There is going to be Hell to pay.

Jane Greer edits Plains Poetry Journal *and doesn't have enough time alone with her husband.*

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Ora Pro Nobis

Last summer, on the 10th anniversary of Elvis' death, a reporter called to ask the usual question: What does it all mean? Ah, that took me back.

To be precise, it took me back to August of 1977. We were living in England when Elvis died, and I noticed at the time that the BBC didn't ring up the local sociologists for foolish observations about the meaning of it all; they turned instead to South London vicars. When it comes to ancient, expensive havens for shabby-genteel idlers (usually left-wing) who will bioviate about the larger significance of any subject whatsoever, universities don't have a patch on the Church of England. But since lazy American journalists have no underemployed Establishment clergymen at hand, they have to turn to—well, to people like me, which strikes me as one of the many arguments for rethinking the establishment clause, but never mind.

In a single day recently I had two of these callers. One wanted to know why *Friday the 13th, Part 6* was doing so well at the box office; the other asked what the doubling of vanity license plate sales tells us about life in North Carolina today. I should have said that both phenomena suggest that North Carolinians have more money than is good for them, but I merely referred these seekers to younger colleagues who haven't learned yet how silly you look in print when you answer questions like these off the cuff.

The call about Elvis shouldn't have surprised me, but I wasn't ready for it. I couldn't even remember what those parsons had said back in '77—just something about "bringing us together," and I think "Lord of the Dance" was mentioned—so I referred the reporter to my buddy Charles, an Old Miss historian, who once wrote a wonderful piece on Bear Bryant's funeral (q.v.: *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Summer 1987). Charles also keeps a vial of Elvis' sweat in his office, so I thought he'd do.

After the reporter rang off, I got to thinking about that sweat. I also thought about another friend, a Memphis pathologist who told me once after a couple of drinks that he has a fragment of liver. Relics.

At Graceland, in the garden where Elvis is buried with his parents, candles burn, pilgrims pray, tears flow. On the wall of the public men's room, there are (I swear it) messages to Elvis. Votives, honest.

On my wall is a picture of Elvis, ascending a golden staircase to a heavenly Graceland where his mother waits for him and Hank Williams extends a hand in greeting. An icon of the apotheosis.

And—are you ready for this?—a book published last summer catalogs the apparitions since 1977.

Listen, if this were the Middle Ages, there'd be a cult. Heck, there *is* a cult: what more does it take?

The license plates in the Graceland parking lot suggest that this craziness is not exclusively or even mostly a Southern phenomenon. When I was there, at least, Southern plates were a decided minority. Lots of us down here are fond of Elvis, but he's a home boy—one of us—and certainly no saint. We find Elvisolatry amusing and try to figure a way to make some money off of it, as I'm doing right now. (One of my favorite efforts is an amazing song by a former North Carolina Bible-college student named Mojo Nixon; call your local radio station and request "Elvis Is Everywhere," because I can't even *begin* to summarize it.)

Besides, Evangelical Protestantism is rather stern in these matters. Some time ago, the Gallup Poll showed that Southerners are less likely than other Americans to believe that it's possible to communicate with the dead, despite the fact that we're more likely to believe in an afterlife in the first place. Pilgrimages, relics, shrines, apparitions—no, this isn't really our kind of thing.

But orthodox Catholics (if there are any left) probably aren't heavily represented among Elvis' more extreme devotees either. With the mellow wisdom of the ages, their church takes all this stuff in stride, but Rome has routinized it, organized it, introduced some quality control.

A few years ago, a group of us, Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, got together to read and discuss a highly touted book called A *Common Catechism*, written by an ecumenical group of Continental theologians. It quickly became clear that the important distinction in our group was not between Protestants and Catholics but between those who were orthodox and proud of it, or unorthodox and ashamed of it, or who-knows-how-orthodox but committed to the proposition that orthodoxy exists and the church should teach it, and those (call them "liberals") who felt that truth is in the seeking, or is whatever works for you, or is something we all have a piece of—those, in other words, who found the concept of orthodoxy quaint, if not alarming.

Now the interesting thing is that these liberals have far less reason than traditionalists to make fun of the credulous. When Tennessee country folk see the Holy Face on the side of a freezer, or a mother tells the tabloid *Star* that "Rock Hudson's Ghost Cured My Son of AIDS," or some poor soul thinks Elvis answers prayers written on a men's room wall, liberals have no basis for ridicule other than intellectual snobbery. On what grounds can they say these people are not just tacky, but *wrong*? How do they know? If it's every man for himself in matters of belief, why shouldn't some Middle-Americans beatify a small-town Southern boy who liked peanut butter and banana sandwiches? Hey, it works for them.

We'll be seeing a lot more of this kind of thing. As Flannery O'Connor tactfully implied from time to time, the absence of ecclesiastical authority means the efflorescence of creedal and devotional extravagance, not its absence. And someone, probably Ches-

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terton, has observed that in a secular age people don't believe *nothing*, they believe *anything*. The book our group was supposed to be discussing began with a great deal of blather about what "modern man" would and would not believe. Its version of modern man was heavily influenced by 19th-century scientism; he looked, as a matter of fact, rather like a Continental theologian. But I've got news for the book's authors. Last I heard, modern man was out on the West Coast waiting for the harmonic convergence.

The decay of orthodoxy leaves a vacuum that certainly can't be filled by the desiccated rationalism of the *Common Catechism*. And the amorphous, nonjudgmental, sentimental quasi-religion of my liberal friends can't say why it shouldn't be filled by the cult of St. Elvis.

John Shelton Reed is a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His birthday is January 8, the same as Elvis'. They're both Capricorns.

Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

The Writer as a Young Liar

Recently, someone asked me to review *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, but so far nothing has come of it. The book, published by Rutgers University Press, is the fruit of many years' work under the direction of Joseph Frank, author of the voluminous Dostoyevsky biography. It contains a selection of 152 letters, culled from the four-volume Soviet edition of 935.

I have now read the selection, together with all the letters in the original Russian, and I am starting on the *Diary*. So far, however, I have been unable to form any original impression of the writer, save one: in his youth, Dostoyevsky was a pathological liar. But more of this later, perhaps. For the time being, I invite the reader to join me and the 23-year-old Fyodor in St. Petersburg. It is September 1844.

For the past six years, since he became a student at the Academy of Military Engineering, almost every letter Dostoyevsky has written has to do with money, an interest that would remain with him for the rest of his life. July 3, 1837: 30 rubles, 12 rubles. September 6: 14 rubles. October 8: 950. December 3: 70, 300. February 4, 1838: 50, 300. June 5: 25. August 9: 40. March 23, 1839: 60, 100. Well, perhaps it is reasonable for a student, far from his parents' house, to write home asking for money, even despite the fact that the old man, recently widowed, was barely able to make the ends meet. But what for? June 5, 1838: "Absolutely all my new friends have bought themselves their own shakos, and my general-issue might have offended the Tsar" during a parade (he forgets mentioning earlier that the parade in question had involved a total of 140,000 troops).

Writing to his son from the family estate on May 27, 1839, Mikhail Dostoyevsky pleaded: "From the beginning of spring until now, not a single raindrop, not even dew. The heat, the horrible winds have ruined everything. . . . What threatens us is not just bankruptcy, but real starvation! After this, will you reproach your father for sending you so little? . . . I enclose thirty-five paper rubles, or 43 rubles 75 kopeks by the present exchange rate. Please use it sparingly, since, I repeat, I will not be able to send you anything again soon." According to Joseph Frank, "so far as one can judge, Dostoyevsky never wrote home for funds without eventually receiving the sum requested." Mikhail Dostoyevsky's plea was written in response to his son's demand for money he "absolutely needed" to buy, in particular, a trunk in which he wanted to keep his possessions, along with other sundries (e.g., a subscription to the French "book club" of the time). Mikhail Dostoyevsky died on June 8, 1839, under mysterious circumstances (possibly murdered by his serfs). Thus, according to Professor Frank, "his despairing communication to his son was, literally, his last testament, and Dostoyevsky must have received it almost simultaneously with the news of his father's death."

Now, five years after his father's death, young Dostoyevsky directs his energies to the person of Peter Karepin, a wealthy, middle-aged gentleman who, upon marrying Fyodor's sister, became the trustee of the Dostoyevsky estate and the family's legal guardian. Fyodor receives an officer's salary, along with regular payments from the estate, but he is far from pleased. He writes to his brother on September 30, 1844, that he is "in a hellish predicament." He has decided to quit military service ("I resigned because I just had to resign"): "Life is bleak if one's best time is wasted."

> No one knows that I am leaving the service. If I leave right now, what shall I do? I haven't got a kopek to buy clothes. My resignation becomes effective October 14. If those Moscow pigs [i.e., the trustees] don't come through with the money in time, I'm done for. I shall be dragged off to jail for sure (no doubt about it). It's really comic.

Dostoyevsky's answer to the "hellish predicament" is to attempt extorting 1,000 silver rubles from the prudent Mr. Karepin in exchange for a promise to renounce all future claims on the estate. Naturally, Mr. Karepin (perhaps on the basis of the young man's "track record" to date) does not want to believe him, doubting both the genuineness of the need and the legality of the promise. I have dug up one of Karepin's letters to Dostoyevsky, and, since it is unavailable in English, I translate it here nearly in full, retaining the syntactic oddities of the original.

"Dear brother," Karepin writes to his brother-in-law, "I send you 50 silver rubles; in return for the arrogance, and the rudeness, with which your letters are filled, I enclose two accounts—one for last year's silver, and the other for this year's assignations; finally, my conclusion as to which of you has received the most money. As you will see, you have been sent the most, Andrei received little, and Nicholas nothing at all. There was perhaps good reason for this, as you had to be set up during your first year out of the Academy; after that, clearly, one brother has no right to draw more than another, not to mention your sisters. Your father's estate yields, as we have seen from the experience of the past three years, approximately 4,000 paper rubles, depending on the harvest or the market price of the produce. From this we must subtract the trustees' fee, payment of private debt to Mr. Marcus, to whom

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1,000 rubles is owed, so each brother receives 700-800 paper rubles, up to 1,000 in a good year. That is your basic capital.

"Apart from the sorrow induced by the realization that a son does not value the labors and cares of his late parents, wishing to squander everything they have suffered for one year after leaving school and God only knows in the name of what—it has not been possible to sell a share of the estate in your behalf legally since you were still a minor. It remains impossible, because the estate is held in trust, the debt has not been repaid, and there are other minor siblings. Even if after a long process of legal petitioning of the relevant authorities one were to obtain their leave to redistribute the estate, one would still be in a similar difficulty, since there would not be enough to pay you off all at once, while even now you regularly receive more than your share against future proceeds, to be accounted for in the final reckoning. This difficulty will remain not only as a moral but also as an official obstacle to any redistribution.

"I hesitate to tell you this truth because you understand it yourself, but also because it is easier to imagine the carelessness of youth rather than cold egoism and utter indifference to one's family.

"No sooner did you put on your uniform than you began mentioning two things: your inheritance and your debts. I kept silent, thinking it all -

many people—you are not the first—are out there, making their way in life, guided by pure, clear, and ever-just principles of work, duty, and patience, with all the intelligence the good Lord has granted, with a good education. . . . Are you destined to cling to your splendid sophistry, to abide in the abstract sloth and languor of your Shakespearean dreams? What's in them, besides some enfevered, inflated, inchoate—exaggerated, and soap-bubble-like—image? Whereas, in reality, before you lies a road of honor, of serious endeavor, of social good—not in some slavish imitations of another's vision, but in the achievements of your own, hard-earned intelligence and knowledge.

"If you have ears still for the advice and friendship and kin, then may you hear this, dear brother!" I have run out of space. Karepin's letter continues for another paragraph.

"Those Muscovites are unspeakably vain, stupid, and quarrelsome," young Fyodor commented on Karepin's advice writing to his brother on September 30, 1844. "In his last letter, Karepin for some unearthly reason advised me not to get too enthusiastic about Shakespeare! He says Shakespeare is just like a soap bubble. I wanted you to know about this idiotic resentment of Shakespeare. How in the world does Shakespeare come into the picture? You should have seen the letter I wrote him! In one word, it was a model piece of polemics. I really gave it to him." A paragraph later: "In the name of God, ask them to send me that money! What worries me most is that I shan't have anything to put on."

The letter ends: "Karepin drinks vodka, has a rank, and believes in God."

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor for Chronicles.

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SCREEN

Siren Song

by Katherine Dalton

***I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*; written and directed by Patricia Rozema; Vos Productions.**

Shall I part my hair behind?
Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel
trousers, and walk upon the
beach.
I have heard the mermaids
singing, each to each.
I do not think that they
will sing to me.

"My theory," says Patricia Rozema, "is good art is what you like." Rozema, a down-to-earth, 28-year-old Canadian, is the writer, director, editor, and co-producer of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*. *Mermaids* can be hard to describe: It is both a film about independence and a Canadian ode to incompetence — about an impossibly red-haired, wildly inadequate "organizationally impaired" temporary secretary in Toronto named Polly.

Polly is the kind of person who says "Holy Moly," whose polyester sweaters and milk mustache and malapropisms belie a vivid inner life. She comes complete with bicycle and a slightly nosy love of taking black-and-white photographs. She also has a salt-of-the-earth self-sufficiency and sincerity that puts the better dressed, better educated, better spoken people she idolizes to shame. To her employer, the curator, Polly is just a "sweet imbecile," a half-life half-lived. But she is more like what the Russians call a holy fool — wiser than the "wise," and under some good angel's protection.

Rozema does not pretend she has no axes to grind. The trick, according to her, is to distract the audience from the proselytizing at hand with the story of Polly's coming of age. "I do spend a lot of time thinking about what I'm trying to say and how I'm going to hide it," Rozema says and smiles. "I have strong didactic, evangelical tendencies which I have to sugarcoat with really nice characters like Polly."

Rozema's ax here is just the old saw "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." "Artistic relativism" is what Rozema calls it, and it sounds almost too simple, perhaps. But then again, if the excellent is something other than what you like, who is making that judgment for you? Is taste something you should really leave up to the art critic at the *Toronto Star*? Or Anatole Broyard at the *New York Times Book Review*? Somebody in the English department at Yale? Your mother? Or someone with a more forceful personality or better credentials? To say good art is just what you like is, I'll grant you, naive. But if good art is what somebody else likes, that's just pretentious. And what good has pretension ever been to anybody?

So our heroine, our champion of the independent opinion, is this 31-year-old "person Friday" who proclaims things like, "Isn't life the strangest thing in the world?" and "Y'know, sometimes I think my head is like a gas tank, and you have to be *really careful* what you put into it, or you mess up the *whole system*." It's like having Don Quixote for your knight. Certainly Polly is nothing if not unpredictable — from ordering by number in a Japanese restaurant (she gets squid), to taking photos of a couple in the park (she gets caught), to being hours late for the curator's birthday party (with lipstick over the entire lower half of her face).

Polly is, says Rozema, "my license to be earnest." She is ours as well; endearing for just that earnestness, and by the end of the movie so wonderful because, despite every crazy thing about her, she is right. And the curator, with whom Polly is in love ("that's a strong word to use when it's not your mother, but there you go," Polly shrugs), is not right. Polly sends in her photographs (under a "pseudo-name") to the curator, who dismisses them with a glance and a sharp remark and destroys Polly. Polly pedals home, burns all her prints, and pushes her camera off the roof. It is a terrible scene, really, for all Polly's funniness — it is as if Shakespeare's best fool, Dogberry, and not Lear, were going mad on the heath.

Not many films take a line of Eliot's for their title, even a line from his most famous poem. Rozema says she was hard up for a name, happened to be rereading "Prufrock" one day, and latched upon the image for her film. Eliot's elegantly metered dirge to the death of initiative is mournfully sophisticated and cynical, in a way neither Rozema nor Polly is; Rozema has to stretch the image a bit to make it fit (those mermaids show up in Polly's daydreams).

There are, actually, another three lines which fit the movie better:

We have lingered in the
chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with
seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and
we drown.

It takes so little — an offhand remark — for the curator to kill what was for Polly the whole of her existence. But holy fools live under the special protection of the Gentleman upstairs, and Rozema has written a comedy: Polly discovers her idol is a fraud, and that's all she needs to bounce back in her idiosyncratic, inimitable way.

This film is not a product of Hollywood. *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* was made for peanuts ($275,000 American) and shot in 23 days, with a

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Shadows in the Limelight

by Bryce J. Christensen

An American television viewer will witness more violence in a single evening than an Athenian would have seen during a lifetime of theatergoing. Acts of violence were virtually prohibited in Greek drama, and Aristotle goes so far as to argue against the use of "mere spectacle" to produce the desired catharsis of pity and fear: "Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy."

Our modern pursuit of the spectacular has more "monstrous" consequences than anything Aristotle could have imagined. The old distinction between the publicly decorous and the *obscene* (literally "off scene") has been all but obliterated as journalists learn how to exploit the pornography of grief. Last year a newspaper photographer in Bakersfield, California, eagerly snapped a photograph of a distraught father kneeling beside the body of his drowned child. His editors' qualms about publishing it quickly gave way to irrepressible hopes of a Pulitzer prize. Even when there is no anguished parent in the scene, the press dishonors the dead and their relatives by publishing photos of those who die violently. A modern Antigone would have to

: dead brother quickly if she
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more omnipresent than the
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egularly violates all the propri-
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y public displays of sex as by
iolence, although the two
different responses: fear and
the one hand, titillation on
Relatively few wish to com-
er acts of violence, but few
for celibacy. Still, there are good reasons for keeping lewdness out of the public eye. S.I. Hayakawa struck a note of truth when he argued against pornography not on traditional moral prohibitions (which he did not accept) but on the grounds that some human activities are transformed and coarsened by any public display. Actions that in private could express shared feelings of love must always deteriorate into exhibitionism when performed for others' viewing.

The psychology of debasement cannot explain, however, *why* the cult of publicity has grown so strong in our day. Part of the problem lies in the greed of advertisers, but we must look more deeply into our culture to find an explanation for the growing impulse to push every human activity into public view. We may take a cue from literary critic J. Hillis Miller, who has detected in the late Victorian era "a movement from the assumption that society and the self are founded on some superhuman power outside them, to a putting in question of this assumption, to the discovery that society now appears to be self-creating and self-supporting, resting on nothing outside itself."

For centuries, men had understood that events not in public view were still under divine scrutiny and judgment. But when society replaces God as the object of worship (as Émile Durkheim believed that it should), then society must become as all-seeing as Deity. The Supreme Court was merely following the spirit of the age (but not the Constitution) when it ruled in the famous "Fanny Hill" case of 1966 that communities could not ban any obscenity with "redeeming social value." For a society can "redeem" its claims to omniscience only by permitting, inviting, and even coercing *everything* of potency and force into public view. But even the optimists of the High Court began to blanch at the consequences of their ruling. In 1973 in *Miller* v. *California*, the Supreme Court abandoned its "redeeming social value" standard for obscenity and replaced it with "contemporary community standards." Because most communities — at least those west of New York and south of Washington — still dimly remember that they are *not* autonomous or self-generating, this new standard has proved more satisfactory, although seven years of unrestrained smut seriously eroded public standards even in Peoria, Illinois, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

But our cultural weakness for obscenity will not be resolved merely by keeping the sexual, violent, and perverted out of public view — though that would be a splendid start. Unlike the modern entertainers and journalists who turn every human experience — celestial or bestial — into a media event, ancient philosophers and saints understood the need to conceal precious experiences and truths from the mob. In the first book of *The Laws*, Plato points out that serious political criticisms should be shared only among the wise and not in the public marketplace: "If an older man has any reflections to make, he must impart them to a magistrate of his own age" in "a private conversation" when "none of the younger men are by." Plato's refusal to record his dialogue on the Good reflects in part his distrust of all publicity, even writing. Plato understood that the highest truths emerge in the living conversations of earnest men but that even speech proves inadequate to *re*-present them fully. It is no accident that the cruelest of political ideologies, Communism, has its roots in Hegel, who at a time of rapidly increasing literacy falsely supposed that "A truth cannot lose anything by being written down." The antireligious bias of Communism grows naturally out of an insistence that while revolutionaries may have to use clandestine means for

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a time, the triumph of socialism makes truth and meaning as publicly visible as a May Day parade or an editorial in *Pravda*.

Jesus similarly refused to put everything on public display. He warned His disciples not to "cast pearls before swine" while repeatedly urging those He healed not to publicize what He had done for them; He cautioned His apostles not to tell others of His identity as the Christ nor to disclose the miracle of the Transfiguration until after His Resurrection. Jesus shared His sublimest truths orally amid a select group, allowing merely mortal — albeit divinely inspired — disciples to write the public record.

Whatever has changed over the millennia, this much has remained constant: those with the most to share will do so discriminately and discreetly. This is not cowardice, although it is true that a reluctance to disclose unpopular principles often springs from nothing but expedience. Yet men betray the sacred and the profound by displaying them too casually, allowing them to be ridiculed, commercialized, and misappropriated. "Human kind / Cannot bear very much reality," as Eliot observed. Like sensitive photographic film, some truths can be ruined by overexposure. When bishops and philosophers elbow one another trying to get in front of the cameras and microphones, we may take their lack of contemplative reserve or spiritual restraint as evidence that their views are probably not worth hearing. Even discounting the recent PTL scandal, it is hard to give much credibility to wealthy pastors who uncritically embrace television as a fit medium for gospel ministry.

Yet religion may suffer worse harm from clerics who crave an interview on the evening news than from those who turn their sermons into television spectacles. As clergymen devote ever more attention to promoting political agendas of the sort that win media attention, religion loses the doctrinal conviction and spiritual reflection that should define its innerness and integrity. Partly because many clerics have forgotten the New Testament injunction against public displays of charity and piety, moral principle in the mainline churches is rapidly dissolving into histrionics. Things might be better if fewer religious leaders took their credentials from Ivy League schools, where ethics has become largely a matter of politically correct posturing. The intellectual historian James Billington recently observed that a disturbing disparity is appearing on the nation's campuses, as professors lead idealistic political crusades (into the headlines) yet tolerate "complete self-indulgence on immediate, personal issues." His point was forcefully illustrated not long ago when organizers of a special antiapartheid fast at Brown University complained that all of the media attention had been diverted to covering the break-up of a co-ed prostitution ring.

In morals and religion, Modern America is trading the innerness of Platonic *re-cognition* for the glamour of public recognition, with incalculable loss in the exchange. Western culture has repeatedly struggled to keep the antinomian impulse in check, yet without utterly snuffing out the belief that truth and salvation do finally come to man from God and not from human society. But once our cultural elite could no longer discern the *imago dei* in the individual, all nonscientific truths came to seem historically contingent and socially mediated. Surely nothing could be learned through personal prayer and fasting or listening for "the still small voice" of the Holy Spirit. No longer a divine gift, nonempirical truth depends for its very existence upon the unceasing, strenuous, and graceless efforts of "consciousness-raisers" who can win the public ear. It is no wonder if George Garrett concludes that publicity is "all the truth we have left." Or as the novelist and theorist of language Umberto Eco puts it: "Even prophets have to be socially *accepted* in order to be right; if not they are wrong."

Holding the keys to public attention, media celebrities and national journalists become insufferably arrogant. Two and a half centuries ago, when the cult of publicity was just beginning, even Alexander Pope succumbed to a moment of overweening pride in the power the public press gave him: "Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see / Men not afraid of God afraid of me."

In a society of rootless individuals clamoring to establish the *reality* of their lives by having them publicized, nothing tethers the prying irreverence of the journalist or the towering presumption of celebrities. While corporations, churches, and universities spend huge sums to hold the attention of the media elite, if only for a moment, the rigorous sciences and disciplined arts decline. A distressing number of professors, artists, athletes, and businessmen can now scarcely act at all without the stimulus of public attention. Alasdair MacIntyre has justly warned of the hollowing out of modern arts, sciences, and games, as the cultural emphasis shifts from the satisfactions "internal" to their practice, to external recognition and rewards.

With every election, the passion for publicity distorts American political life more. It is not just that a candidate's political fortunes are increasingly shaped by how much air time he can afford and how good he looks on camera (although that is part of the problem). Even more troubling is the way in which movie stars, television personalities, and glib journalists now exert the kind of political influence once reserved for military heroes, senior statesmen, industrial giants, and accomplished scholars. For no other reason than his part in *M*A*S*H*, Mike Farrell now receives a more respectful hearing on many campuses for his views on American foreign policy than Jeane Kirkpatrick can find for hers. Just as incredible was the successful media assault that Gregory Peck led against the Supreme Court nomination of Robert Bork. A recent article in *The New Republic* reported that for current Democratic presidential aspirants, winning Hollywood's approval may be more important than winning Iowa's or Michigan's. We rejected monarchy for *this*?

Predictably, the aristocracy of a publicity-driven culture will preach those doctrines which flatter the largest number of people in the potential viewing audience, fostering a naive faith in human equality at the expense of a sound respect for individuals exceptionally gifted in talent, wisdom, or creative vision. Few can travel the difficult path to genius and accomplishment, but Andy Warhol spoke for the media age when he suggested that *everyone* deserved to be a celebrity for at least 15 minutes. The media flatter

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their audiences so persistently that it is hard to understand why Dante put flatterers in the eighth circle in hell—although as newsmen and personalities go to their reward, that neighborhood is bound to decline.

As cable television and VCR technology create ever more viewing opportunities, as TV cameras multiply in courtroom and in legislative chamber, as schools create "media literacy" courses, as universities and churches devote ever more resources to public relations—in all these developments, a priceless resource dwindles. Americans are either surrendering or devaluing the private, nonpublicized space where individuals may still commune with their thoughts, with close friends, and with God. In the long run, the fate of the culture depends not on those who "stay on top of" all the current trends in entertainment, politics, economics, and opinion but upon people who turn off the set and hang up the telephone when a pollster or a journalist calls. As the cult of publicity continues to gain strength in America, meaningful life will still depend upon a personal willingness to pursue the truth in solitary silence rather that to affirm falsehoods amid thunderous applause.

Bryce Christensen is editor of The Family in America.

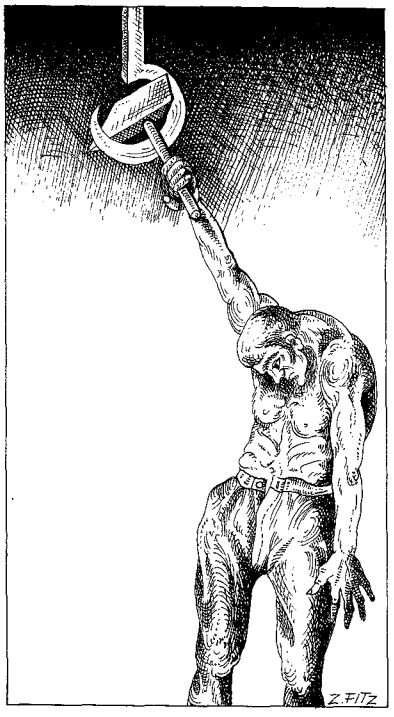
POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On 'Hooked on Socialism'

"Hooked on Socialism" by Paul Gottfried (*Chronicles*, January 1988) is like an exposé bringing up to date the early Bolshevik-Menshevik split. The West reels under what Mr. Sidney Hook calls a "form of secularization, dedicated to the broadest religious tolerance," but that could be the Menshevik strategy hidden under a modern label. The Mensheviks believe in the evolutionary takeover while the Bolsheviks took Russia by revolution. Having ruined that part of the world, the Bolsheviks are now challenging the Mensheviks for control of the West.

But showing tolerance for religion does not give the secularist the key to success. What can be said in his favor, if we are very very kind, is that he is not as efficient as the Bolshevik in destroying the part of the world he shows an interest in controlling.

If the conflict between East and West is to be waged with any hope, it must be a conflict between orthodox Christianity and atheism. Any form of atheism, be it labeled secularism or communism, cannot lead to a satisfying life because it seeks a future based on a false and dangerous optimism. The atheist believes that society without God can be man's heaven on earth.



G.K. Chesterton once said that Christianity liberates through dogma while materialism imprisons by making the world finite. From these two views we get an inkling of the kind of world man must live in if he is to live in harmony with his nature and creation.

Believing that man without God is able to forge ahead, he becomes a victim of his own deception when the sin problem turns his plan into chaos. His optimism afflicts him with a fatal blind spot which renders him helpless in coping with sin. In short he manages only to compound sin with atrocious sin (legalized abortion being a case in point) and ultimately he is driven to a Jim Jones-type madness. Mr. Chesterton had warned that wild reason, not wild imagination, is what makes man mad.

Christianity had found the way to persuade man, the backslider, to function more on the angelic side of his nature. In doing so Christianity has liberated man. And Christianity is the only doctrine known to man that truly liberates.

—Frank Broussard
Opelousas, LA

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